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spring 2005

capital thoughts

This year's centenary of Cardiff as a city warrants a close examination of its role and in particular its relationship with the rest of Wales. Set against other cities around the British Isles Cardiff has no obvious parallel. It lacks the grace, visual grandeur, and easy confidence of Edinburgh. Compared with Dublin it lacks critical economic and cultural mass. In size it measures up to a medium English city such as Nottingham. Yet it has ambitions which are far more extensive. After all, it is our capital city. What English city of equivalent size has a Cathays Park, a National Museum, a Millennium Stadium, a Millennium Centre for the Performing Arts, or a landmark building to house a National Assembly, now rising in Cardiff Bay?

Although Cardiff is also celebrating 50 years as the capital of Wales during 2005 it is undeniable that many Welsh people have yet to come to terms with its role. One thing that unites many Welsh people outside the city is a perception that too much wealth is concentrated within it. For instance, in our special feature in this issue David Blackaby and Stephen Drinkwater ask whether Cardiff has benefited more from being our capital city than Wales has benefited from having Cardiff as it capital. Would such a question be asked of London, Edinburgh, Belfast or Dublin?

Part of the mixed feelings about Cardiff can be attributed to the changing character of the Welsh industrial experience, explored by Peter Stead in his contribution. Although the overwhelming majority of Welsh people live in an urban environment, in their imagination they often live somewhere else. Most of us have a rural location somewhere in our hinterland. Perhaps as Peter Stead suggests, we continue to inhabit in our heads what the late Sir Glanmor Williams described as "an archipelago of small towns and villages." Such an outlook rests uneasily with the realities of the metropolitan world that Cardiff increasingly represents.

Contradictions like these can only be worked through over time. Maybe another fifty years are required. In the meantime what can the city fathers do to address them? One thing they can certainly do is to improve Cardiff's connections with the country it serves in a more focused and determined way. For example, a notable failing is Cardiff's transport links, both internally between the city centre and the Bay, and beyond, especially its connections with the Valleys that were responsible for its creation. What we need as a start is a modern, light rail or tram network, of the kind common in other European cities, to integrate Cardiff with the Vale and Valleys.

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upfront

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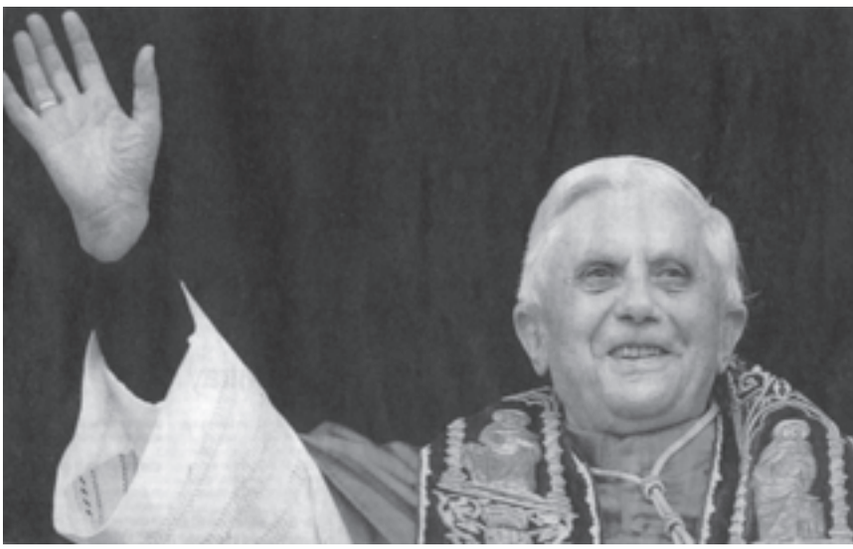
politics & policy



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Cover: 1995 sculpture, 'A Private View' by Kevin Atherton, commissioned by CBAT and South Glamorgan County Council, and located on the Taff Viaduct in Cardiff Bay. Photo by Pat Aithie of Ffotograph.

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newsflash

coming up...

- **Cardiff Lunch:** The Future of the BBC with guest speaker Michael Grade, BBC Chairman Hilton Hotel, Cardiff, Monday 12 June 2005. £27.50 for IWA members; £32.50p for non-members
- **Debate:** A National Gallery of Modern Art 22 June 2005, Glynn Vivian Gallery, Swansea. 6.00pm Debate 7.30pm. Reception with artists William Wilkins and Ifor Davies and arts consultant Dave Clarke. Chaired by Peter Stead.
- **IWA National Eisteddfod Lecture** Wales and the Future of Europe Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas, Presiding Officer, National Assembly The Pagoda, National Eisteddfod, Caernarfon, 12 noon Tuesday 2 August, 2004. Lecture to be delivered in Welsh with simultaneous translation

just published...

- **Wales on the Web** Gregynog Paper by Andrew Green, National Librarian of Wales, £7.99
- **Integrated Children's Centres in Wales** Interim report from ongoing IWA research project, £10
- **Welsh Politics Come of Age: Responses to the Richard Commission** Book edited by John Osmond £14.99

more information:

www.iwa.org.uk

power broke

john osmond looks at the career of Denzil Davies to discover some clues on the future role of Welsh MPs at Westminster

Following a bruising electoral contest it may be an unkind question, but in the age of devolution what are Welsh MPs for? In the general election campaign health issues dominated much of the debate and MPs report that this remains a constant issue for their constituents. Yet in Wales decisions on health reside with the National Assembly. The same applies to schools, council tax, environmental issues such as wind farms and much of the rest of the domestic agenda.

And although Westminster still controls the Welsh purse strings and is the place where major decisions on the economy, defence and foreign affairs will be taken for the foreseeable future, the work of Welsh MPs hardly registers in the Welsh press and media except at general elections. In between it is Assembly Members who generally occupy what little space and airtime is granted to politics. And so far as London journalists are concerned Wales warrants barely a flicker on their Richter scale.

This is only one part of the dilemma that confronts our newly elected Westminster representatives in establishing their role and recognition. For devolution threatens a fundamental destabilisation of their traditional function. The coming of the National Assembly and its likely development means that in future most Welsh MPs, whether they are in Government or Opposition, are likely to be confined to the backbenches. This is simply because, since the Assembly is responsible for most of Welsh domestic policy, Westminster governments will increasingly want their Ministers to represent English constituencies. And for the same reason political advancement within the UK parties will be harder for Welsh and Scots MPs.

These realities are presently disguised by the large Scottish presence in the outgoing British Cabinet, in particular Gordon Brown as Chancellor, John Reid as Health Secretary, Alistair Darling at Transport, and formerly Robin Cook as Foreign Secretary. However, this predominance is likely to prove merely an echo from the pre-devolution age.

In future, too, we are likely to have fewer Welsh MPs. Certainly, this was the view of the Richard Commission which examined the case for extending the powers of the Assembly. It argued that sooner or later the National Assembly will achieve full legislative powers and when that happens the number of AMs will need to increase, probably from 60 to 80. At the same time, and following the precedent already set in Scotland, the number of Welsh MPs will have to reduce, probably from 40 to 32.

In these circumstances what kind of career will Westminster offer aspirant Welsh politicians? How attractive will the job be if all they can look forward to is unending obscurity, occupying a place of influence perhaps, but with little prospect of power? Few are better placed to help answer these questions than Denzil Davies, who has just retired as Labour MP for Llanelli after spending the best part of 35 years sitting on the backbenches.

At the outset of his career it all looked very different. His was a brilliant arrival as MP for Llanelli in 1970. Brought up the son of a blacksmith in Cynwyl Elfed in the heart of rural Carmarthenshire, he had an outstanding academic career. He studied classics at Carmarthen Grammar School, won a place at Pembroke College Oxford, and emerged in 1962 with a first class degree in law. He then spent a year at Chicago university, followed by a lectureship at Leeds university before being called to the Bar in 1966. In the same year he was on the short list for the Labour nomination in the Carmarthen by-election. In what was undoubtedly a fortuitous stroke of luck he was unsuccessful, since Plaid Cymru's Gwynfor Evans won a notable victory in that campaign. But he had been noticed, and when James Griffiths announced his retirement as MP for Llanelli a few years later he inherited a much safer seat.

Denzil Davies at home in Burry Port.

Within five years he was in the government as Minister of State at the Treasury, Harold Wilson approving of his expertise as a specialist in tax law. A few years later, as Financial Secretary he was knocking on the door of the Cabinet. "It was a fascinating four years," he said. "The government had no majority. I was regularly in the House of Commons at 3am trying the get Finance Bills through. We had the oil crisis and the International Monetary Fund breathing down our necks." However, the 1979 election and the arrival of Mrs Thatcher soon ended his government career. Apart from a short period as Shadow Defence spokesman in the mid-1980s when he made a folorn bid for the deputy leadership of the party, he has spent the remaining 25 years an isolated, rather brooding figure on Labour's backbenches.

He has pursued a lonely path making interventions on foreign affairs, and particularly Britain's role in Europe which he has observed with a growing scepticism. When he had an opportunity to return to the Labour's Front Bench under John Smith's leadership in 1992 he refused because of his opposition to European integration and the Euro. However, it is this preoccupation that has provided him with a vision of the potential future role of Welsh MPs at Westminster. He says they should concentrate on what might be termed 'High Politics', the large-scale, strategic global matters beyond the role, and certainly the powers, of the National Assembly.

In a famous intervention during the passage of the 1997 Wales devolution Bill Ted Rowlands, then MP for Merthyr, bemoaned the implications for his representative role. He declared that if he were to advise one of his children where to set their sights on a political career he would not be able to recommend Westminster. Instead he would tell them that in future the National Assembly or the European Parliament would be where power would increasingly reside. Denzil Davies said this reflected Ted Rowlands' engagement with the domestic agenda. As he put it:

> "I agree that if your main preoccupations are with health, say, or education, then the National Assembly is, and increasingly

will be, where the decisions on expenditure will be taken. However, my interests have been largely in the fields of defence and foreign affairs and I foresee a continuing role for Welsh representation on these issues at Westminster.

"This reflects the reality, as I see it, that there will be a greater role in future for the nation state to take the initiative in adapting its policies and priorities to meet global trends. Governments are going to have to respond quite quickly to changing situations within the global economy. But the more you entrench your powers and procedures in organisations like the European Union, the more you constrain your freedom. This is because the treaties that underpin such organisations inevitably circumscribe what you can do."

His Euro-scepticism goes back to the early 1970s when he recalled that he and Brynmor John, then MP for Pontypridd, were called in to see Roy Jenkins, the leading Labour figure advocating European integration:

"I tried to listen but I didn't like what I was hearing. I felt the process would be good for lawyers but not for democratic accountability. At the time Edward Heath and the Tories were in favour because they thought it would kill off socialism - this was a market we couldn't close down. In the Labour Party its supporters such as Roy Jenkins believed it was a mechanism for controlling the multi-nationals. In the end, however, it was neither capitalism nor socialism but about a transfer of power. Being a Celt I could smell a loss of sovereignty a mile away. The English didn't really appreciated that at the time."

How did he respond to the more principled argument that the Common Market, later the European Union, was necessary to lock France and Germany into so strong an embrace that they could never contemplate another war?

"I never believed that. Maybe I'm just a Welsh anarchist but I couldn't buy that fashionable stuff. It was the division of Germany after the Second World War, and NATO and the Soviet Union that preserved peace through the Cold War.

"I don't think the EU will work ultimately for England. When I was at the Treasury I was impressed with the French economic planning system across the Channel. The French had a consistent approach to investment and industrial planning that we just couldn't seem to emulate. Meanwhile, we were struggling with trying to implement a prices and incomes policy to control inflation, through wages agreements with different sectors of the economy.

"I think the Welsh and Scots would have gone along with the French approach, but the English just wouldn't have it. Temperamentally they didn't believe in planning, they didn't want it.

"I can see that the Welsh, Scots and Irish can support the European Union as a counterweight to England. But how can you have one interest rate to cover a Union from here to Turkey? You have to have an economic union before you can have a political union. You simply can't get a political union across 23 countries. De Gaulle was right. They should have kept it to the original six. I think I've also been proved right in the way the Common Market, now the European Union, is developing."

Along with Ted Rowlands Denzil Davies was also famously sceptical about Labour's devolution proposals in the 1999 referendum. In particular they opposed the element of proportional representation that was part of the settlement. He said:

"I felt it important to ask some basic questions. But I've never been against devolution in principle. I voted for it in 1979 and 1997. As I saw it the Welsh Office was outgrowing itself and there didn't appear to be effective accountability. In addition there was the problem of the Quangos. It was a natural extension to have an administrative Assembly, with the expectation that the Quangos would be absorbed into its operation - although the Welsh middle classes didn't want that to happen.

"If we move to legislative powers I agree with the Richard Commission that that will necessarily mean more AMs in the National Assembly. Inevitably that will mean a decrease in the number of Welsh MPs. In turn that will reduce the impact Welsh MPs can make at Westminster. At the same time it is going to be more difficult for Welsh MPs to make progress within their parties at Westminster. Taken together this will mean a diminution of their influence."

In evidence to the Richard Commission he argued that the case for giving the Assembly legislative powers was constrained by finance. As he put it:

"We are reaching the point, I believe, where it is democratically unacceptable that the United Kingdom Parliament should be asked to transfer functions to the National Assembly in circumstances where the cost of exercising those functions effectively falls on United Kingdom taxpayers, but where the democratic representatives of those taxpayers have no say in how those functions are exercised by the National Assembly … Since Wales comes nowhere near being able to fund from its own resources total government expenditure in Wales, it would not, I believe, be right for the central government to be asked to fund the cost of further devolved functions while being denied any say on how those functions are exercised."

This was, in effect, a fiscal analysis of what has become known as the 'West Lothian question', named after the constituency of Tam Dalyell, the Labour MP who constantly raised it during the devolution debates of the 1970s. In short, following devolution why should English MPs allow their Welsh and Scottish colleagues to vote on English matters when English MPs are denied a vote on Welsh and Scottish domestic affairs? The answer has been the compromise solution of reducing the number of Scottish MPs, a course that is likely to be followed in Wales when the Assembly acquires legislative powers.

Denzil Davies acknowledged the political reality of this compromise. He also accepted that in practice it is very difficult for MPs at Westminster to influence the Welsh policy agenda. Looking back he said the only experience he had had of wielding such influence was when he had been in government:

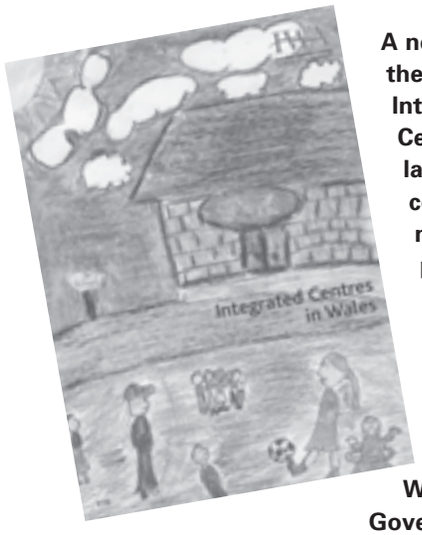
> "When I was at the Treasury a departmental brief passed across my desk arguing the economic case for the immediate closure of twelve pits in south Wales. Rhondda MP Alec Jones, then Minister of State at the Welsh office, and myself joined forces to argue a strong case against this within the Department of Energy and we won the day. The paper was quietly dropped."

He agreed that such opportunities would rarely be presented in future, if at all. Instead, it was now be up to the Welsh First Minister in the National Assembly to take Wales's case directly to Whitehall. What then will be the role of a likely diminishing band of Welsh MPs, apart from providing lobby fodder for their parties? If Denzil Davies' record is any guide it is surely to develop expertise in world affairs and to become an independent voice to represent where possible a distinctive Welsh view. In Denzil Davies' case the opportunity was presented most forcibly in the vote on the Iraq war in 2003. As he put it:

> "On Iraq I voted against reluctantly, since I was no more in favour of Saddam Hussein than anyone else. But going to war is not something to be done lightly. You have to weigh up the probabilities and it seemed to me that after the first Gulf War Iraq was hardly the threat it was being made out to be. I knew from experience that intelligence is hardly ever as detailed and specific as the 45-minute warning claim suggested. Also, I watched Tony Blair very closely when he was making his key speech advocating the war. It was a fine speech in terms of the rhetoric. But there was too much certainty and the approach was messianic. You had the feeling that he believed he could change the world. There was a glint in his eye. I was not persuaded."

• *John Osmond is Director of the IWA.*

integrated children's centres



A new IWA report, tracking the development of Integrated Children's Centres across Wales was launched at a Cardiff conference attended by more than 100 practitioners and policy makers in February. The publication marked the completion of the first phase of an IWA research project funded jointly by the Welsh Assembly Government and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

The report maps out the development of the Assembly Government's innovative Integrated Children's Centre policy. This entails the establishment of at least one centre in all the 22 Welsh local authorities to combine early years education and care with a range of services for families and young people. Bringing together four key elements of early years education – childcare, open access play, training, and community development – the centres focus on a wide range of social problems.

The IWA's report notes that while there is great enthusiasm amongst policymakers and practitioners for the project, a number of stumbling blocks have prevented more rapid development. The first is a lack of appropriately trained staff. Given that the centres offer a multitude of services with different procedures and protocols, invariably the success of the centres will depend upon the skills of the centre managers and staff. Many fear that limited budgets and historically low investment in multi-disciplined training will mean that they will fail to attract the right calibre of staff with some posts having to be re-advertised before they are filled.

A second problem identified in the report was incorporating the open access play within more traditional approaches to early years education. In part this was due to a lack of experience with open access play facilities. greater co-ordination between play organisations and centre staff should enable this problem to be overcome.

However, the biggest problem for the centres has been a lack of revenue funding. Whilst they have received substantial capital funding from both the Assembly Government and the Big Lottery Fund, they have struggled to finance their running costs.

The second phase of the IWA's study is now examining ways of tackling these problems by developing guides to best practice.

- *Integrated Centres in Wales is available from the IWA at £10.*

creu cyfle – cultural explosion

A 352,000 euro project, led by the IWA has been selected as the only project from the UK to be funded under the European Union's PRINCE Programme. In total 400 proposals were submitted to the scheme from across the European Union and 48 were chosen, with the IWA being the sole successful bid from the UK.

Creu Cyfle-Cultural Explosion is an innovotive project involving a large number of organisations including Academi, Dawns i Bawb, Gwynedd Council, S4C, and the William Mathias Music Centre. The aim is to create new and ongoing linkages between cultural organisations in Wales and those in the ten new member states of the European Union. It will be launched on the first of July to mark the first day of the UK presidency of the European Union.

A large proportion of the activities will be focused on the new Galeri centre for the performing arts recently opened at Caernarfon. They include:

- Dance, music, literature and media iniatives, plus a mosaic in Caernarfon's new Victoria Dock.
- A gala concert and conference in Caernarfon on 19/20 February 2006.

- *Eluned Haf writes more on Creu Cyfle-Cultural Explosion on page 48.*

fine tuning for high tech success

by Robin Roberts

Some of Europe's best known new cars get their final seal of approval only after they have been driven in secret on demanding Welsh roads, a leading Ford executive told an IWA Swansea Bay Branch lunch in February. "Much of the public road development of some of our best-known vehicles takes place on the roads of north Wales," declared Richard Parry-Jones, Vice-President for Global Product Development at Ford. "Believe me, if a car can perform there, it can perform anywhere."

Richard Parry-Jones is also Ford's Chief Technical Officer and heads up a department of 30,000 engineers, designers and scientists. He has a home in north Wales where he was born, and uses his knowledge of the area to fine tune the chassis of such cars as the Ford Fiesta, Focus and Mondeo before they go into production.

He told his audience that included automotive business leaders that they needed to think globally to survive. "It's no longer just a matter of supplying one plant in one location," he said. "It's essential that Wales-based suppliers think with a global mindset and look for opportunities on the world stage. You can bet the competition will be thinking and acting in that way, so the Welsh components industry must step up to the challenge.

"The only way any of us stay in business is by being globally competitive on the world stage. This also means not trying to compete in those areas where the odds are stacked against us. There's no point in focusing on providing low cost, low tech components because we cannot compete with the low cost economies of Eastern Europe, let alone China, India or South-East Asia.

He said that Ford's experience at the Bridgend Engine Plant showed what could be achieved when management, the unions and our employees work together and pull in the same direction. "That the plant is the sole global source for Jaguar V8 engines speaks volumes about its ability to step up to the mark in producing hi-tech, premium quality products. They've built on that success through some of the additional orders they've won from Volvo and Land Rover. And let's not forget the other 535,000 hi-tech petrol engines they build for Ford each year."

He said the Welsh were too shy about the success of their indigenous motor industry, pointing out that it is made up of some 50 international component suppliers together with around 250 other companies. In total it employs about 28,000 people. The collective sales generated from all this activity has been valued at an average of £2.5 billion a year. The industry was benefiting from a growing Welsh support structure, including:

- The Welsh Automotive Forum which provides a voice for the industry.
- Accelerate Wales which is playing an important role in developing supply chains that meet the challenge of world class competitiveness.
- The Auto Technium in Pembrey which is creating a centre of excellence for performance engineering.
- The Waterton Technology Centre at Bridgend which is helping to increase skill levels by forging links between industry and academia.

Richard Parry-Jones at the wheel

"Much of the success of the industry here in Wales has been due to the proactive roles played by government at both the Welsh and Westminster levels," Mr Parry Jones said. "For example, the Welsh Development Agency has been very successful at winning a host of projects which have helped to stabilise and encourage growth within the auto industry. The WDA's role in securing Regional Selective Assistance funding has helped to keep down costs and maintain competitiveness. I believe the WDA is a role model for other economic development agencies, both in the UK and elsewhere in Europe.

"I do not want to underestimate the importance of the Westminster political apparatus in all of this, but I do get the strong sense of an increase in the commitment to securing more investment in Wales since the creation of the Welsh Assembly. The automotive industry – alongside electronics and avionics – has been a high priority for the Assembly since its inception, and the similarities between these three sectors is leading to synergies and the sharing of concepts, experience and knowledge."

wales behind: europe in front

peter finch finds delicate light in anonymous Cardiff

There's more rain, sheets of it, coming in from the south west and pouring up Queen Street. The pedestrians are mostly half clad and trying to ignore it. Style but no grace. This is Friday night and the capital is doing what it usually does. Celebrating the present. Living in the hedonistic moment and doing it for all it's worth. Reports that Cardiff consumes more alcohol than anywhere else in the UK might not look that realistic in the suburbs on a Saturday morning, but they do along St Mary Street at 2.30am most nights when the clubs disgorge. Cardiff Fun City. Business Centre. Empire of the stable and the senseless.

The city has been the Welsh capital now for more than fifty years but only in the last ten has it really begun to show it. Drinks Capital, Sports Capital, Service Capital, Call Centre Capital, Shopping Capital, Capital of fast cars and media businesses, Capital of the creative arts. "Culture is now our core business," said Russell Goodway, former Council Leader and one-time Lord Mayor, although nobody really knew just what that meant.

Cardiff never made it as EU Capital of Culture for 2008, although it bid hard. Other contenders were bigger places. Liverpool, another post-industrial port with a multi-cultural hinterland and the city which won, is enormous by comparison. Cardiff doesn't connect with its Valleys was one of the judging panel's criticisms. The Valleys which gave the city its industrial existence. Rhondda. Taff. Rumney. Their populations flock here for the glitter of Cardiff's shops and the gleam of its bars. They run our service industries, manage our call centres. Do we do anything for them? We take their money.

Cardiff, which began as a sliver of a medieval town, clustered inside town walls, south of the Castle, east of the Taff river, is now an extended lozenge. It's built into the elongated space that lies north of the sea and south of the ridges that mark the beginnings of the coal field. Cardiff squeezes east through Trowbridge, Pentwyn and Pontprennau to threaten Newport. Pushes west through Ely, St Fagans and Creigiau to look in the eye of Swansea. Strip developed. Hanging round the rail link for warmth. It can take a good forty minutes to drive across – chicaned and bus laned. Traffic lights at every super-store. Nowhere else in Wales comes anywhere near us.

As a city Cardiff is new. Other than the Castle and a few churches there's little extant that pre-dates Victoria. Until the industrial revolution Cardiff wasn't much more than a market town with a silt-threatened quay and a reputation for ruffians and occasional fishing. 1800 years of languishing on the way to somewhere else left us little exploitable history. The Romans used Cardiff as a staging post on their way to Neath. In the middle-ages Carmarthen was a much bigger and more important town. Only the accident of having a navigable river quay with the iron and coal valleys leading to it allowed Cardiff to develop. With their better tides, both Barry and Swansea might have made it, but geography was against them. Newport, too, might have been in the running if it hadn't been for an early failure of tramway and railway builders to exploit the routes to their natural epicentre.

The coal and iron explosion of the early nineteenth century made Cardiff expand like an angioplasty balloon. The Bute family, above all others, held sway: land owners, transport developers, dock builders, pre-eminent exploiters of trade. They were in charge for more than a hundred years.

By the time the boom was all over and industry in rapid decline the population had risen by more than 250,000, sucking in immigrants from all over Wales, from Ireland, the West Country, and beyond. We lived in Victorian terraces or slumland back-to-backs. The streets were dark. Cardiff, leading coal exporter of the world, five docks, a hundred warehouses and endless rail yards, sat, smelling of the steel works, in the unending Welsh mist.

World cities had long pasts, great ancient buildings, planned early redevelopments, trappings of Empire, might and power. Cardiff had St John's Church, the Castle, Splott and Grange farmhouses and a monument to a great ancient tree which once stood at Fairoak. The stump is still there, top of Ty Draw Road, rotting but signposted. Go take a look.

There are other parts of the past which we could have honoured. But mostly we've knocked the city flat. The Georgian Town Hall on its island in the middle of High Street; the Victorian Town Hall with its monumental columns lining St Mary Street; the Cardiff Arms Hotel sitting at right angles across Castle Street; the great Park Hall Cinema and Theatre, now a car park; the medieval Town Walls, now a couple of metres back of Bradford & Bingley; Bethel Chapel, later the Casablanca Club, in Mount Stuart Square, now an open space; the perfect termination of Georgianesque Windsor Place in the arc of St Andrews Crescent, now wrenched apart by Boulevard de Nantes and its four lane traffic; Hills Drydock; the Rhymney Rail Station; the Canal which made parts of Cardiff look like Amsterdam; the Missions to Seamen; The Mariners Church on the West Dock Basin; the Custom House, the North and South, the New Sea Lock, the Glastonbury Arms, the Greyhound, the Rainbow Club, the Cape Horn Hotel, the Peel Street Mosque.

These things have gone and, for the most part, are now unremarked in the landscape. No plaques or signs. There was one on the Town Wall but it's been taken down. Should Cardiff have redeveloped itself differently? Or are these memories of past places merely nostalgia? Cities should not be museums. Some things will inevitably be in the way, others will fall down. Cardiff's history has been badly served by the rush of the late twentieth century. The gallop for profit has given us new bars and apartments to be proud of. The lights of Cardiff Bay now shine all the way over to Bristol. Snow domes on Ferry Road. Millennium Star Cruisers on the Arms Park. A great boulevard connects the old city with the new. The bronzed cycle helmet of the Wales Millennium Centre changes colour with the sky. But the past has largely been forgotten. Cardiff is now a post-modern city – dense, growing, and anonymous.

Unlike its rivals Cardiff relishes its otherness. Distance and alienation; a world unknowable, full of anxiety, speed and noise. It does not yet have the high-rise, system-build and featureless city block look of Chicago or Birmingham where adornment, embellishment and personalisation have been sacrificed in the face of the pulsating hoards. But it does have anonymity and it celebrates

that. You can go from one end of Queen Street to the other on a crowded Saturday and have no one look at you, other than charity collectors and Big Issue sellers. You get swift service from shop assistants who never talk to you. You can have an affair here and no one will spot you. You can commit a murder and not be caught.

But don't let's exaggerate the depersonalisation. Compared to Manchester, Birmingham or London, life here is all sweetness and delicate light. A promised land of Ikea, Marks and Spencer, B&Q. And places you can actually walk to.

I'm walking now, down Lloyd George, towards the Bay. The magnet of water. In front of me is the focus: Pier Head Building, red brick with unaccountable cannons still in its forecourt, dwarfed by the new buildings around it. Schizophrenic Lloyd George with its two street signs on opposite sides: *Lloyd George Avenue* and *Bute Avenue* – the two makers of Wales. Along it run Persimmon's apartment blocks – Rimini, Amalfi, Sienna, Sorrento. All Italian. Behind them rises Redrow's Altolusso on Bute Terrace, 292 skyscraper apartments. A new Mediterranean for Wales. Lloyd George spills out onto Roald Dahl Plass, Norwegian author, son of Cardiff. To my right, beyond the underpass graffitied as *Docks Crew 2003* is the Greek Church. Then Ty Gobaith, for the destitute. Cardiff: Wales behind it, Europe in front.

- *Peter Finch is Chief Executive of Academi, the Welsh writers organisation. This essay is adapted from his* Real Cardiff Two – The Greater City, *Seren Books, 2004.*

city reflections

peter stead wonders where Welsh urbanity begins and ends

We are all suburban now" was Leo Abse's immediate conclusion as he learnt of the Welsh Tory gains in the 1979 General Election. That day I could not have been the only member of his television audience who felt uncomfortable and a little ashamed to be told that I was now a citizen of an increasingly suburban nation. I have subsequently been forced to concede that in strict sociological terms I am essentially a suburban man, albeit one who no longer lives in a 'semi'. This realisation hurts because, of course, I imagine myself to be a truly urban man, someone whose identity has been forged by all those sophisticated elements that define modern urban culture.

In dinner parties one always seems to end up talking about where one would ideally choose to live and, once I have protected my image by boasting that Chelsea and Manhattan are my favourite places, I more honestly explain what, in Welsh terms, my criterion would be. I explain that I would find it impossible to live more than fifteen minutes or so from a range of pubs (preferably including a Brains house), Indian, Chinese, Italian and French restaurants, a mutiplex cinema or two, a theatre and concert hall, a league football ground, several rugby grounds, a college and reference library, five or so bus routes, a mainline railway station with regular and direct trains to London, a few supermarkets, a fish and chip shop, an art gallery, a beautiful medieval church, an off licence, a travel agency and finally, and quite essentially, a sea view. I am then a simple, man, easily pleased and, as it happens, thoroughly contented and fulfilled.

Having got that off my chest I then have to listen to almost every other person present extol the virtues of the Welsh countryside. I quite enjoy their accounts of deepest Gower, the Beacons, Cardigan Bay, 'unknown' mid Wales and even occasionally, and somewhat perversely it seems to me, distant north Wales. But their loving descriptions, taken together with an inspection of their inevitable framed landscapes by the latest artistic genius to come out of Fishguard or Machynlleth, are enough for me. My urban identity is clinched by my relative indifference to the hinterland, a deprived world from which my ancestors were happy to escape. I am a strictly once or twice a year man. I just need the occasional day out (and it has to be that) to reassure myself that Wales is still both lovely, and sleepy.

In truth most of my urban requirements were met from the outset as I was born and grew up in Barry, a town that I thought of essentially as a Bristol Channel seaport. It was a world every bit as satisfying, and indeed fascinating as the one Dylan Thomas had found some forty miles along the coast. I was shaped by that town and have always expressed gratitude and loyalty towards it, but I was always aware that my essential persona had been determined at an earlier time in other places. Both my parents were products of the south Wales Valleys and had grown up in the inter-war Depression. They had both belonged to families that had experienced unemployment and personal tragedy. My grandmother had died during her ninth pregnancy when my mother was one, and when my father was fourteen his father died as a result of an accident underground. Throughout my childhood I was taught the realities of industrial life and told of how families dealt with the inevitable reversals of fortune. I have never doubted that it was from earlier family experiences that I took the spiritual, ethical and political values that I have attempted to sustain. There had been drama in their lives (far more than I was ever to experience), but it had not been all doom and gloom for the Valleys had given them (as I was to be reminded in all my holidays in their childhood homes) a totally positive outlook on life.

Two themes stand out and constitute influences for which I always give thanks. Both my parents thought of themselves as being thoroughly urban and as citizens of towns that were integrally a part of an urban culture that extended across the United Kingdom and indeed the United States where relatives had migrated. The Welsh language was spoken at the hearth and in chapel but alongside that easily accepted base there was an open invitation for them to avail themselves of schools, clubs, sports, societies, films, dance halls concerts

chain stores and cheap excursions. The whole point about surviving financially was that there was, not so much 'out there' as, all around a world of entertainment and diversion. To be modern and sophisticated was to avail oneself of all this fun.

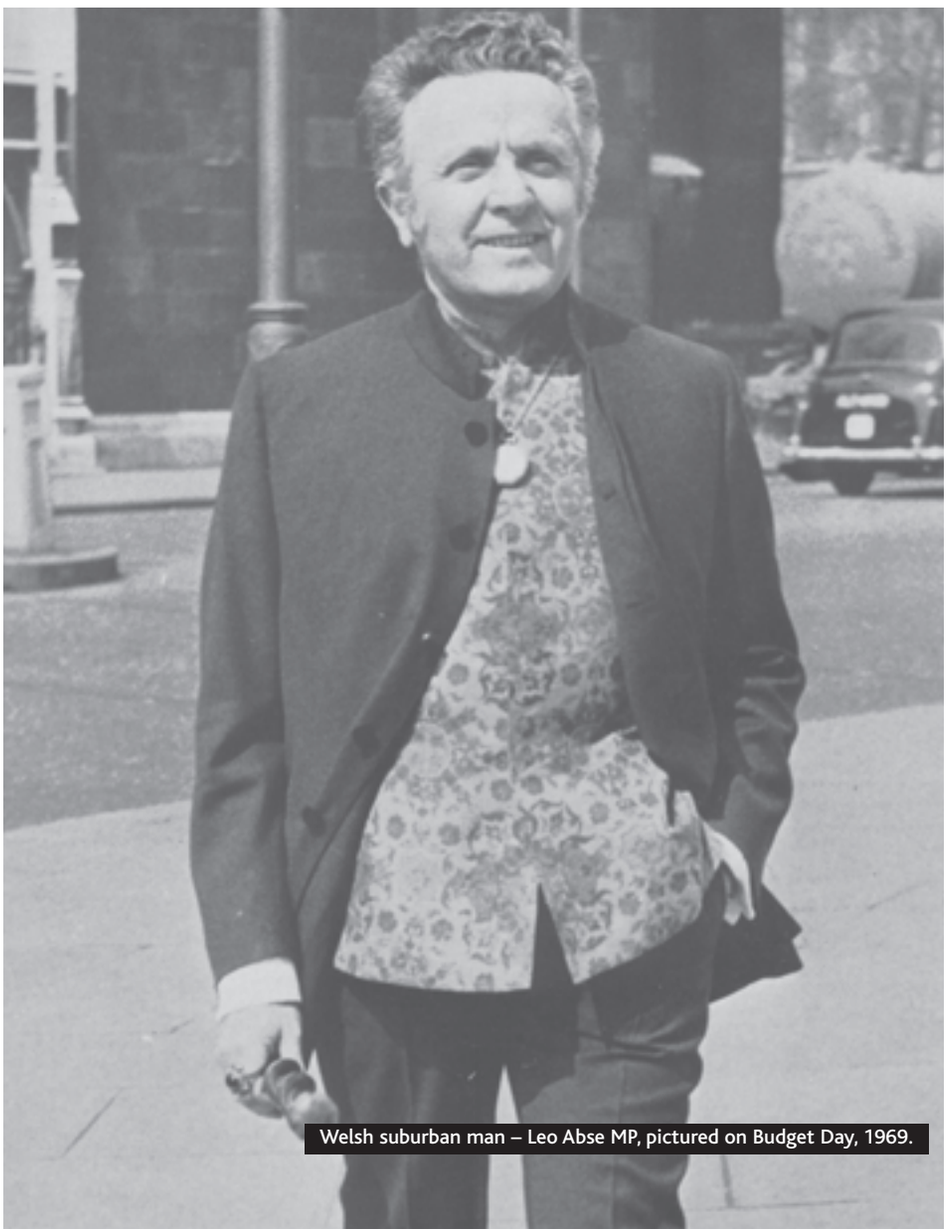
This sense of being in the swim rather disguised a more complex sociology. All my parents' immediate ancestors had come to town from Victorian rural society, be it in Wales, England or Ireland and they had brought much of the countryside with them. The old farm or village remained the spiritual home, and even in the new industrial world there were chickens, geese, ducks and even ponies to be looked after. Meanwhile, their Valley-reared children could take the bus into the town centre and enter the twentieth century. And the important point is that they could enter it in the knowledge that their particular town was as good, if not better, than anywhere else in the Western world.

More than anything else, what I took from my parents was this sense that their upbringing had been special, that they had been educationally and culturally fulfilled because Merthyr and Maesteg, although savaged by the Depression, had not only been as up to date and modern as anywhere else but were in themselves wonderful places of which they could unashamedly boast. I have gone on boasting for them and even now I echo my father in believing Merthyr to be a key metropolis in the history of Western civilisation and my mother in thinking Maesteg rather trendy.

That urban world of which both my parents and I were products had a final flourish in the 1960s before de-industrialisation plunged hitherto vibrant and culturally self-sufficient small towns and villages into a new era of decay, anonymity and lifelessness. There were consolations such as the internet, satellite television, cheap flights to Spain and the growing sophistication of Cardiff, but there was no disguising the fact that a huge tract of urban Wales was now the poorest part of the European Union and that many of the structures that normally allowed urban fulfilment had collapsed. For over a century industry had done everything for us. First there were jobs and then, as the historian G.M. Young said, "things tended towards a culture". Of course, it is always the job of the historian and social commentator to analyse the way cultures are tending and it must be said that for urban Wales things were not looking good. We had lost our way.

As Welsh communities lost their economic raison d'être there were other obvious explanations for urban decline such as the dominance of the car, the unrelenting imperialism of television and the decline of public transport (especially rail). Of course, this is precisely where Leo Abse's analysis becomes relevant for in general our middle classes have become entirely suburban. They live in their semis in fairly well defined zones at the edge of town or preferably on more spacious lots in adjacent villages where the dogs, green wellies and four-wheel drive vehicles allow a degree of squirearchy play-acting.

Not only is life in the suburbs good (the school run is a bit of a nuisance) but it allows one to escape any degree of responsibility for what goes on (or does not go on) downtown. Necessarily one has to go to the occasional formal function or WNO performance, but in general downtown has been abandoned



Welsh suburban man – Leo Abse MP, pictured on Budget Day, 1969.

Miners coming of shift at Maerdy Colliery, the last pit in the Rhondda where there were once 52 pits: "I was always aware that my essential persona had been determined at an earlier time in other places" (Photograph from *A Century of Struggle – Britains Miners in Pictures 1889 – 1989*, NUM 1989).

and control has been handed to the brewers. This is probably a worldwide phenomenon but I suggest it would be hard to find another urban area in the Western world to rival Wales in terms of the number of once commercial and cultural buildings converted to bars. The pub has always been important as Dylan Thomas made clear in Old Garbo, the classic text of Welsh urban life, but not even he could have predicted that Welsh urban culture would become exclusively a matter of boozing.

Quite simply in Wales we need to reconstitute urban society. A showpiece Cardiff is highly desirable (every society needs a metropolis) but it is not enough. The task is huge because to an extent we disguised the fact that our classic urban culture (1880-1980) had flourished in what Sir Glanmor Williams once described as "an archipelago of small towns and villages". We were always essentially villagers masquerading as townies but our unrivalled rail network allowed us to get away with it. We were never unremittingly urban in the same sense of London's East End, New York's Lower East Side or Chicago's South Side and one visit to San Paulo was enough to make me feel like a real country bumpkin.

Now many people in Wales, especially the old and the young are stuck in what are unmistakably dead villages or far-flung estates. Urban life means a train or bus journey in and a crowded taxi ride back in the early hours. It is a journalistic cliché that 'taxi drivers know best', but only in Wales do they know more about society than teachers, policemen or politicians.

Throughout urban Wales local heritage committees have been established with the specific aim of engendering local pride. Together with other historians I have been approached by them to give talks in which I highlight why village X or town Y played a crucial role in forging Welsh radical politics, or to give an account of how that particular place's famous sons and daughters had gone on to fill churches, win matches, scribble a few stories or poems, thrill Covent Garden and take Hollywood by storm.

Thanks to dedicated and inspirational teachers our villages and towns still pour out talent. But now 'out' is the operative word. The able students, charismatic actors and singers and precocious athletes are off to a wider and more favoured urban world and will return to Wales only for Christmas and the occasional award ceremony. Quite simply the range of life-fulfilling opportunities on offer in our best schools and colleges must now be made available around the clock to society as a whole. The cultural richness of the short school day must become the template for the life of the local community in general. Everything must be done to ensure that access, for access it was that once made these places great.

Life must be injected into our ruined towns and villages and in the larger centres control must be seized back from the brewers. This calls for political vision, but these are tasks that will require more than the efforts of politicians. The people of Wales, that is all the people of Wales, must enlist in the fight to reconstitute urban society. Public money can only be the start. It is now private money that is needed to ensure that there is renewed access to the kind of cultural opportunities that once made Wales distinctive and distinguished.

Corporate sponsorship and hospitality are useful elements but they should not be a substitute for personal involvement. Risks need to be taken, we need faith in people's taste and we should give up that tendency to underestimate our own cultural sophistication. Our only concern should be the quality of local life. It is a huge challenge but if we fail Wales will become merely a land of sheep and tourists with a community of commuters on Deeside and one of politicians and broadcasters huddled around the Taff. Meanwhile, of course, there will always be active Welsh societies in London and Benidorm.

- *Peter Stead is a cultural commentator and visiting Professor of History at the University of Glamorgan*

david blackaby and stephen drinkwater argue that Cardiff's growth is increasing economic disparities between east and west Wales

a cuckoo in the nest

It is fifty years since Cardiff was made the capital city of Wales. Since then, and especially in recent years, it has seen substantial private and public sector investment. This has led to population growth and rising prosperity levels relative to the rest of the country. In recent years there has been a centralization of public sector agencies and public facilities in Cardiff, such as the Millennium Stadium and Millennium Centre and of course the National Assembly, as well as the enormous investment in the Cardiff Bay regeneration project. This has led some to suggest that Cardiff has benefited far more from being our capital city than Wales has benefited from having Cardiff as its capital.

Measures of economic welfare have long been the subject of controversy but in spite of its many weaknesses Gross Value Added (GVA) per head has remained the principal yardstick and standing point in assessing the level of economic activity and welfare in a society. Table 1 shows that a substantial gap exists between levels of prosperity in Wales compared to the UK as a whole and the gap shows no signs of closing. In 2002, GVA was only 78 per cent of the UK average.

Within Wales a substantial gap exists between East and West. Proximity to Offa's Dyke and its major lines of communication to neighbouring English centres of population are major characteristics of the more successful areas. Reflecting its relatively low levels of prosperity in 2000, West Wales and the Valleys qualified for EU Objective 1 funding. The table shows that the level and movement in GVA over time across the three major cities in south Wales is very different. Cardiff has a GVA per head above the UK average and, while remaining relatively stable between 1995 and 1999, its position has seen a dramatic improvement since 1999. On the other hand, Newport had a strong performance between 1995 and 1999 (reaching the UK average in 2000), but its relative position has weakened since 1997. The relative GVA per head in Swansea shows the greatest stability, recording a slight improvement since 1999. Swansea has done much better than the whole of West Wales and the Valleys which has seen its relative position decline since 1995.

These recent changes are somewhat surprising given that West Wales and the Valleys has Objective 1 designation for the period 2000-2006, resulting in a £1.2 billion injection from the EU matched by at least £1.3 billion from other sources. The relatively low level of GVA per head in West Wales and the Valleys is a result of two major factors: low wages and a relatively low proportion of the population of working age in employment. One way in which the gap between East and West was to be closed was through employment creation. However, Table 2 shows that from March 2000 to February 2004 nearly as many jobs were created in East Wales (40,000), as in West Wales and the Valleys (44,000), despite the fact that the labour force is well over a third higher in the West.

Figure 1 also reveals that the employment rate has increased more quickly in the East than in the West. At the same time, a relative improvement has been seen in the position of West Wales and the Valleys since February 2004.

table one: gross value added per head. index (UK = 100)

	Wales	West Wales and the Valleys	East Wales and Vale	Cardiff	Newport and Mon.	Swansea
1995	84	74	101	106	91	81
1996	83	73	100	104	91	80
1997	81	71	100	105	91	79
1998	79	68	99	104	95	79
1999	79	67	100	107	99	80
2000	78	66	100	109	101	81
2001	79	66	101	114	99	82
2002	78	65	101	114	97	83

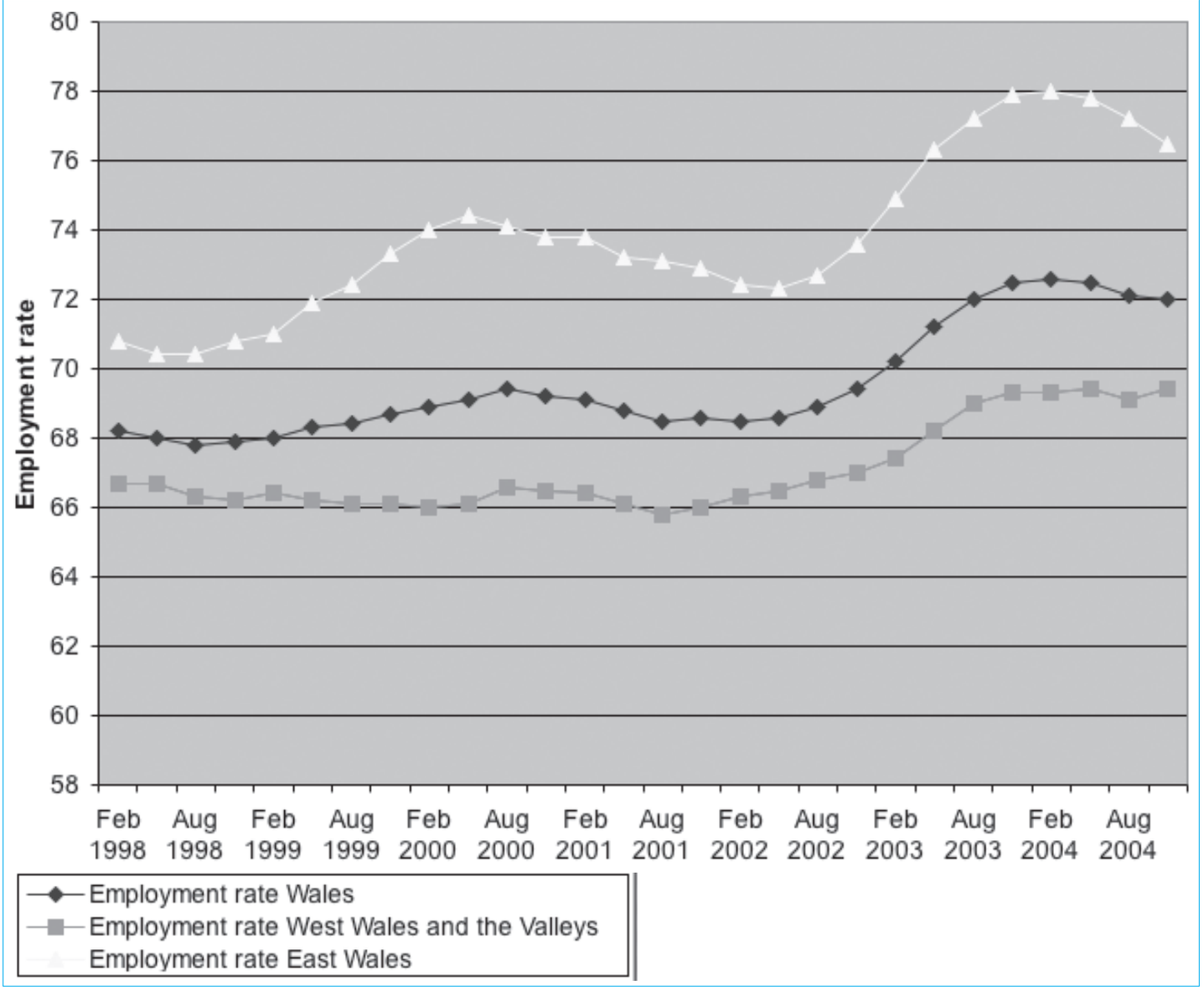
Source: National Assembly for Wales web site

table two: employment '000

	West Wales and Valleys	East Wales
March 97 to Feb 98	743	457
March 98 to Feb 99	748	452
March 99 to Feb 00	737	477
March 00 to Feb 01	744	483
March 01 to Feb 02	752	474
March 02 to Feb 03	760	497
March 03 to Feb 04	788	523

Source: National Assembly for Wales web site

figure one: employment rate (rolling year)



Source: data taken from National Assembly for Wales web site

Table 3 shows that the labour market profiles of the three cities are very different. Cardiff, with a population of 315,000, has seen the fastest growth in population in recent times with a 9.8 per cent increase since 1981. The figure for Newport is 4.3 per cent, while Swansea has seen a 2 per cent population decline over that time.

The percentage of the population of working age in employment is very similar in the three cities, ranging from 70.7 to 71.4 per cent, and close to the Welsh average of 70.5 per cent. Earning levels, however, are very different. Cardiff has the highest earnings at £455.1 per week, well above the Welsh average at £414.5. Swansea has the lowest earnings at £385.3, which helps account for its relatively low level of GVA per head.

The level of earnings in an area will be strongly influenced by its industrial and occupational structure and the skills of its workforce. Cardiff with 47 per cent of its workforce defined as managers and professionals, has an advantage over Newport and Swansea where the figures are close to the Welsh average of 36.1 per cent. Cardiff also has relatively fewer employees in Operative and Elementary Occupations than Newport and Swansea, helping to improve its relative position further.

In terms of industrial structure, Cardiff has fewer employees in manufacturing, while Newport and Swansea are close to the Welsh average at 16.1 per cent. A major strength of Cardiff's individual structure is

table three: labour market area profiles 2003

	Cardiff	Newport	Swansea	Wales
Population	315,100	139,300	224,600	2,938,000
In Employment %	70.7	71.4	71	70.5
Unemployment rate	6	4.9	5.9	5.1
Gross Weekly Pay (Full-time)	455.1	421.9	385.3	414.5
Employment by Occupation %				
Managers and Professionals	47.2	35	37.4	36.1
Administrative and Skilled Trades	23.2	22.1	25.2	25.3
Sales and Service Occupations	15.1	20.2	18.4	16.2
Operative and Elementary	14.6	22.7	19	22.3
Employment by Industry %				
Manufacturing	6.7	17	16.1	16.1
Construction	5.7	3.8	4.2	4.2
Services	87.1	78.7	77.9	77.9
Finance, IT, Business	22	16	16.5	11.9
Qualifications				
NVQ3 and above	51.1	36.9	45.6	40.2
No qualifications	14.3	19.3	16	17.8

Source: Nomis

the relatively high numbers in finance, IT and business service industries.

The level of education and skills is another important factor in determining an individual's earnings and economic success. In a world where the same technology is available to all, it is the skills and resourcefulness of those implementing that technology which determines economic success. Again Cardiff is found to have the highest skilled workforce with over half having NVQ3 qualifications ('A' level equivalent) or above. Those with no qualifications make up 14.3 per cent of the workforce, which is below the Welsh average (17.8 per cent) and below the figure for Newport and Swansea.

The increase in skills base of the Cardiff population has been partly achieved by the migration of the youngest and most economically productive members of the population from other areas of Wales.

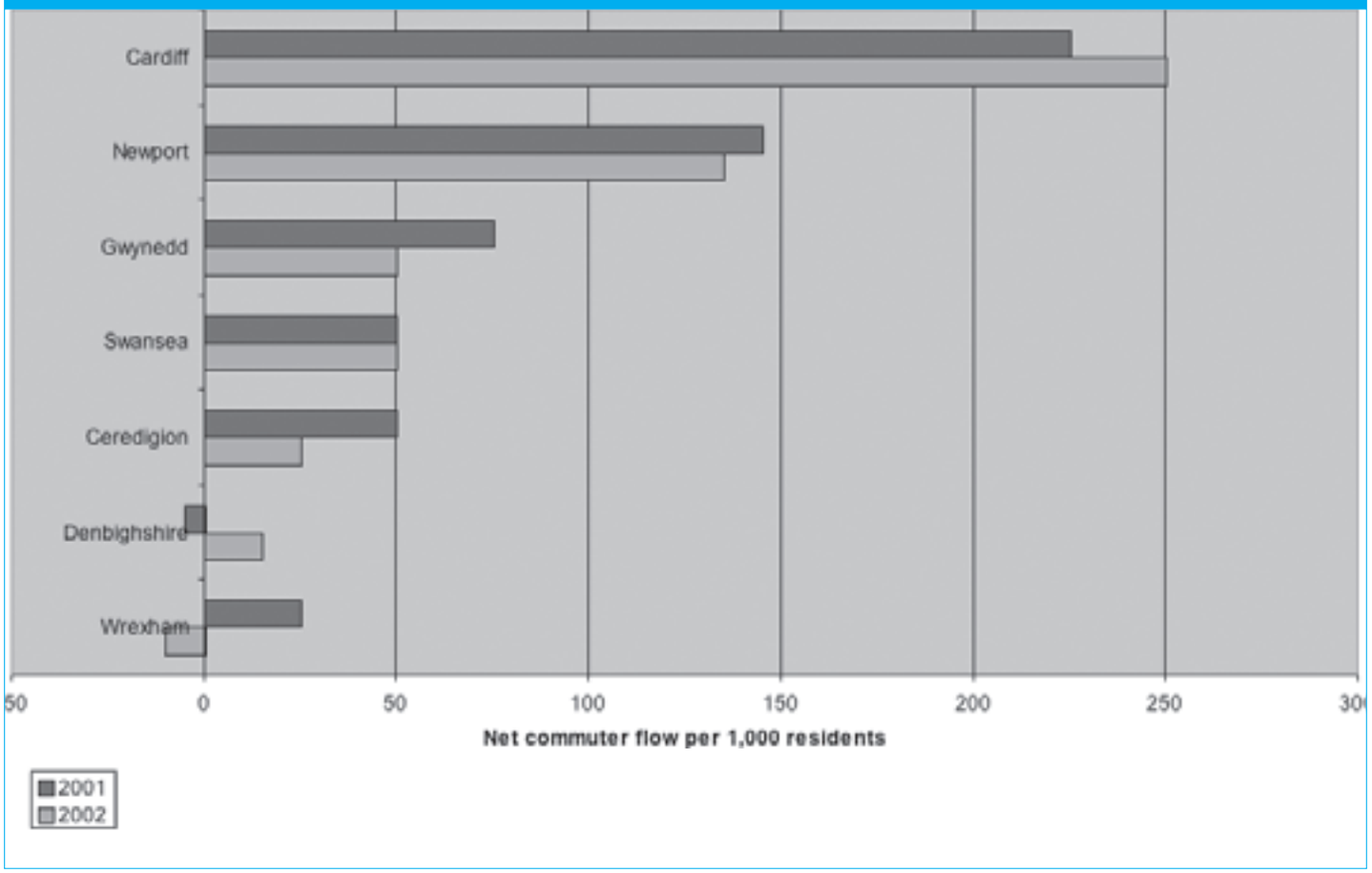
A central economic question facing policy makers in Wales is whether a regionally imbalanced economy is one that can grow efficiently and ensure rising living standards for all its citizens. Concentration of growth in certain parts of the country not only damages the economy's overall growth performance but also creates social problems in the deprived areas and leads to an enormous waste of productive resources.

Evidence reveals that inequalities are increasing in Wales. The economy is increasingly being divided along an east-west axis. There are a number of adverse economic consequences of regional economic disparities. They lead to increases in employment inequality, increases in relative inflationary pressures, and to a less than effective use of the nation's infrastructure and social capital. Moreover, the greater the congestion within a region, the greater the upward pressure on costs and prices, – for example, average house prices in Cardiff are more than twice those in Blaenau Gwent – and the greater the problem of pollution. Figure 2 shows that commuting into Cardiff is increasing and is double that of Newport, which is more than double that of Swansea.

In addition, regional disparities may also have adverse effects on the social unity and solidarity of a nation. Within the UK, a source of injustice and unfairness is felt by many outside the southeast of England arising from political power being exercised by a wealthier region insensitive to the economic problems of other areas. The problems arising from the concentration of political power have resulted in the call for greater self-determination in economic and political matters within the regions. It is somewhat ironic that the spending of Objective One funding is now administered by the Assembly Government out of Cardiff, with many jobs being created in that area from this source.

Also it was recognised that the National Assembly would have a favourable economic impact on the area within which it was located. The government is a source of well-rewarded and high-status employment and acts as a magnet for other well-rewarded activities. This has been compounded by other major investment projects, such as the Millennium Centre being sited in the city. Given its size, an individual investment appraisal may suggest that Cardiff is the most cost effective location for any national facility.

figure two: net commuting as a proportion of working age population



Source: data taken from National Assembly for Wales web site

However, the effect of grouping projects in the capital is to increase regional inequalities.

Many argue that large-scale public investment is still required to 'finish the job' of creating a prominent capital city which will act as a gateway to Wales, attracting further investment and the prosperity created will spread out from Cardiff. The danger is that the benefits may not spread past the iconic gateway. Evidence for a trickle down effect from Cardiff is limited. If the Assembly Government wishes to increase prosperity for people in all parts of Wales, it is important that it monitors its own expenditure and makes decisions to make sure this becomes a reality.

Regional policy in the UK has recognised the importance of reducing regional inequalities. In the 1970s, in recognition of the special needs of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the Barnett formula was introduced. This resulted in these less prosperous areas receiving a higher level of government expenditure per head than the population in England. In addition, many public sector jobs have, in the past, and are currently being moved out of London to areas such as Wales. The Office of National Statistics is moving jobs from London to Newport.

Wales now needs its own internal type Barnett formula and a more active dispersal of public sector jobs to more effectively spread prosperity throughout the country. If the Westminster government can move jobs from London to Newport to reduce regional inequalities, surely given the relative prosperity of Cardiff it is time for the Assembly Government to implement a more active policy of moving public sector jobs away from the capital. Perhaps in Wales we have become overly preoccupied with catching up with England and spending public money where the impact will be largest, rather than spending resources where needs are greatest.

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watershed

denis balsom suggests that the 2005 general election will have a lasting impact on Welsh politics

The prevailing memory of the May 2005 general election is likely to be of Peter Law's remarkable capture of Blaenau Gwent. However, the substance of the full results reveal a number of issues for Wales and, in particular, raise questions concerning the future of devolution and the likely outcome of the next Assembly elections in May 2007.

At one level, the election saw a return to more normal competitive party politics after two exceptional landslide victories for Labour. In Wales this meant the demise of the 'Tory-free' zone and the return of three new Conservative MPs. Many observers had become overly complacent about Conservative prospects in Wales, forgetting perhaps, that in 1983 the Tories returned 14 MPs from Wales. The Labour Party lost five seats, but still returned an historically respectable 29 Members. At the same time Labour's popular support declined to 42.7 per cent, their smallest share of the vote since the dark days of 1983. The Liberal Democrats returned four MPs, something not seen in Wales since 1950, whilst Plaid Cymru lost votes and the seat of Ceredigion.

In the new post-devolutionary Wales, these results need to be measured against two yardsticks: the previous general election in 2001 and the last Assembly election in 2003. On both counts, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives are up. Labour polled a smaller share of the vote in Wales than in 2001, but improved on their Assembly showing in 2003. Only Plaid Cymru fell on both measures, catastrophically when compared to the Party's high point in 1999. Electors in Wales continued to turnout to vote in slightly higher numbers than in Britain as whole and, of course, in much greater number than participated in the Assembly elections.

Meanwhile, Peter Law's election to Parliament raises immediate issues for the National Assembly. With his expulsion, the Labour group is reduced to 29 members, a minority of those in the Chamber. While this may not undermine the Assembly Government on a day-to-day basis, Rhodri Morgan's administration becomes desperately vulnerable to Opposition tactics and is potentially susceptible to a motion of no confidence. It seems unlikely that Labour would seek to form another coalition with the Liberal Democrats, not least because the price they would demanded for any such accommodation would undoubtedly be high. With the Conservative David Davies also returned to Parliament, and not planning to stand down from the Assembly, Rhodri Morgan will be hoping that Westminster duties will keep him and Peter Law absent from many key divisions.

Managing the day to day business of a minority government will no doubt pre-occupy AMs in the short term. Of longer term significance will be the proposed changes to the Assembly's powers, the electoral system and an anticipated boundary review. The 2005 Labour Party Manifesto promised a White Paper on the future

development of the National Assembly. Labour never fully endorsed the findings of the Richard Commission, but undertook to strengthen the powers of the Assembly and to alter aspects of the Assembly electoral system in an amended Government of Wales Bill to be introduced into the new Parliament.

Polling evidence collected in Ynys Môn and Cardiff North during the general election campaign suggested that opinion on the future of the Assembly remains very divided. More than half of intending Conservative voters in these two seats wished to see the Assembly abolished, whereas the two-thirds of Labour voters who supported the Assembly were evenly divided between seeking further powers or retaining the status quo. However, all the principal parties in Wales favour the retention of the National Assembly and any new, British, leader of the Conservative Party will need to recognise this fact.

Whilst Labour may be lukewarm on securing greater powers for the Assembly, there is little doubt of their commitment to amend the electoral system. Labour AMs remain offended that party opponents who have been defeated in constituency elections to the Assembly secure election via the regional lists designed to ensure greater proportionality in representation. The 2003 result in Clwyd West, where all three defeated candidates from the main parties were still able to join Alun Pugh as full members of the Assembly, is an extreme example, but is now universally quoted to discredit the present system.

The Secretary of State for Wales, Peter Hain, has proposed that candidates seeking election to the Assembly must choose to stand either for a constituency, or on a regional list, but are to be prevented from standing for both ballots. Currently, the impact of any such reform would disproportionately fall upon the opposition parties. The party bias of this proposal, in contrast, for example, to the introduction of a full system of proportional representation advocated by the Richard Commission, may have difficulty finding passage through the House of Lords.

Furthermore, in 2006 the Electoral Commission will also assume responsibility for Parliamentary boundaries. Wales currently returns 40 Members of Parliament, a gross over-representation compared to apportionment in England. Until recently, similar disparity existed in Scotland, but the recent report of the Boundary Commission reduced the number of Westminster Parliamentary seats in Scotland from 72 to 59, achieving rough parity with England. The Government of Scotland Act has allowed the Scottish Parliament to retain the former seats for its franchise, whilst returning Members to Westminster from the new divisions. In Wales, the equivalent Act requires Parliamentary and Assembly constituencies to be co-terminus and for the number of regional list seats to be half of that number. Any reduction in Westminster seats from Wales would therefore be immediately felt in the Assembly, where the prevailing view, endorsed by Richard, is that there should be more, not fewer, AMs. Doubtless these matters will be addressed in the primary legislation required to amend the Government of Wales Act, but the way ahead is not straightforward.

Aside from these legislative considerations, undoubtedly the greatest blow from the 2005 general election was felt by Plaid Cymru. The failure to re-capture Ynys Môn and the loss of Ceredigion constitute a serious setback for a Party that, in many ways,

general election result in wales 2005

RESULTS

Party	Seats	Net	Votes	%	Change 2001 – 2005 +/-%	Change 2003 – 2005 %*
Labour	29	-5	594,821	42.7%	-5.9%	+2.7%
Lib Dem	4	+2	256,223	18.4%	+4.6%	+4.3%
Conservative	3	+3	297,830	21.4%	+0.4%	+1.5%
Plaid Cymru	3	-1	174,838	12.6%	-1.7%	-8.6%
UKIP	0	0	20,297	1.5%	+0.6%	-0.8%
Green	0	0	7,144	0.5%	+0.2%	-3.0%**
Forward Wales	0	0	3,461	0.2%	+0.2%	-0.8%
BNP	0	0	1,689	0.1%	+0.1%	-0.3%**
All Others (21)	1	+1	36,390	2.6%	+0.3%	-2.2%
TOTALS	40	6	1,392,693			
Turn-out			62.4%		+1.8%	+24.2%*

* constituency ballot
** regional ballot

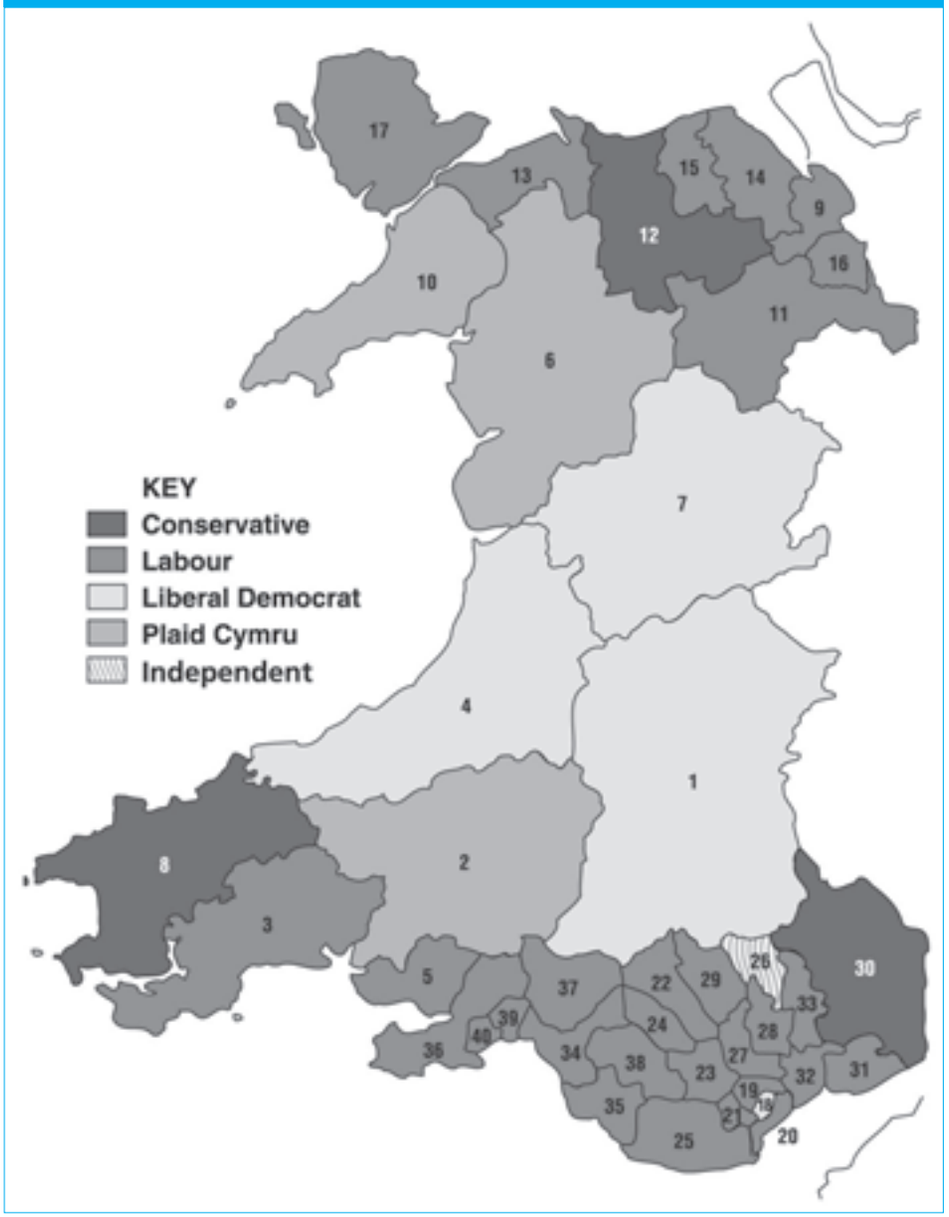
has been the grit in the oyster of modern Welsh politics. In large part, the road to devolution and the National Assembly has been enacted by Labour Governments, but from an agenda significantly driven by Plaid Cymru in Wales and the SNP in Scotland.

As Wales reflects upon the passing of Gwynfor Evans, it should be recalled that without the Carmarthen and Hamilton by-elections, there would have been no Crowther Commission on the Constitution. Without the Commission, no commitment to devolution would have been made, there would have been no referendum and no defeat of the Callaghan government. It can be argued that it was the impact of Thatcherism that really converted Labour to devolution. However, over the last thirty years the Welsh political agenda - whether it be the national curriculum, the Welsh Language Act, S4C, and the Assembly itself - has largely derived from Plaid Cymru acting as a policy making catalyst on Governments of both main parties.

The current malaise in Plaid Cymru is therefore of great import to the further pursuit of the national agenda in Wales. From the high point of 1999, Plaid Cymru has lost seats in the Assembly. In 2004 they lost control of two major local authorities and they have now lost a seat in Parliament. Following the retirement of Dafydd Wigley, the on/off resignation of Ieuan Wyn Jones has given rise not to a collective leadership, but to confusion.

Yet Plaid Cymru is not alone in needing to address leadership issues. Rhodri Morgan will be 68 in 2007 and whilst he remains fit and enthusiastic, Labour cannot ignore the question of succession indefinitely. Post Michael Howard, the Conservatives will have a new leader with possibly firmer views on the status of the National Assembly.Current Tory policy of proposing a 'preferendum' avoids the issue and appears open-minded, but for the Conservatives to prosper, an absolute commitment to the Assembly is surely necessary.

the new political map of wales after 5 may 2005 general election



The Liberal Democrats perhaps gained most at the general election. Charles Kennedy achieved massive exposure, captured the anti-war sentiment and offered a 'soft' alternative to those wishing to defect from Labour. Come 2007, however, the advantages of such electoral prominence seem unlikely. Neither will the Liberal Democrats be seen as part of the outgoing Assembly government as happened in 2003. A new face as leader could therefore also refresh' the Party's offering.

At first sight 2005 would not appear to be a watershed election for Wales, for example compared with 1979. Yet watersheds only became clear with hindsight. If the 2005 results force Plaid Cymru to resolve their leadership issues and grasp the coalition opportunities that this election has now created in the National Assembly, then the longer term impact of an apparent electoral reverse could yet be both positive and profound.

- *Denis Balsom is Editor of The Wales Yearbook.*

high hopes

vernon bogdanor queries whether Welsh politics have yet 'come of age'

The Richard Commission was the Welsh substitute for the Scottish Constitutional Convention, which gave rise to a consensus on the powers of a Scottish Parliament. There was no attempt on the part of the dominant Labour Party to elicit a similar consensus in Wales. It is striking, nonetheless, that the Commission was established just three years after the birth of the National Assembly, a clear sign that devolution in Wales is, in the famous words of Ron Davies, `a process not an event'. Indeed, John Osmond believes that devolution in Wales contains within itself "an inbuilt dynamic for change, one that at times has swept the parties forward on a tide of events seemingly beyond their control". Lord Richard himself said that he had initially been sceptical that change was needed so soon, but had been persuaded otherwise by the weight of the evidence.

The central finding of the Richard report was that the division of power in the Government of Wales Act between London and Cardiff had no logical rationale. The powers of the National Assembly were uneven, if not incoherent; indeed they were "grotesque" and a "lawyer's nightmare". Certainly, few members of the public would have been able to describe with any degree of precision what powers the Assembly possessed. To discover the precise range of powers one has to consult the comprehensive database entitled Wales Legislation Online, at Cardiff Law School – www.wales-legislation.org.uk. Moreover, the ability of the National Assembly to promote its legislation depends crucially upon the exigencies and vicissitudes of the Westminster timetable. The obvious remedy, so it seems, would be for the National Assembly to be given powers of primary legislation on the Scottish model.

The contributors to Welsh Politics Come of Age make much of the fact that the recommendations of the Richard Commission were unanimous. However, the former Labour MP, Ted Rowlands, wrote a letter, published as Annex 8 of the report, distancing himself from the recommendations:

> "I do not believe that the experience and evidence of just four years of the devolution settlement justifies concluding at this stage that it should be supplanted by an alternative model. However, the experience of operating the settlement over the coming years may justify such a change."

Rowlands's caveat anticipated Labour's lukewarm attitude towards the Richard recommendations and, in particular, to the proposal that the Assembly be elected by the single transferable vote method of proportional representation. Moreover, the recommendation that the Assembly be given powers of primary legislation would entail, by analogy with Scotland, a reduction in the number of Welsh MPs at Westminster: and as Charlie Jeffery succinctly comments, "Turkeys rarely vote willingly for Christmas."

Welsh Politics Come of Age comprises essays both by constitutional commentators and by practising politicians, both from Cardiff Bay, and from Westminster. Llew Smith, MP for Blaenau Gwent, is a dissident voice in arguing that the Richard recommendations would lead to separatism. Instead of expanding the powers of the Assembly, he says Wales would do better to abolish it so as to secure real devolution to local authorities. The Commission, he claims, consulted only the "chattering classes" and not the real grass roots of Welsh opinion.

However, it is always wise to be sceptical when politicians claim that they have a unique insight into the grass-roots; and, in perhaps the most interesting chapter in the book, Richard Wyn Jones and Roger Scully of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, show that Smith's claims are not supported by the evidence. They go perhaps a little too far when they say that devolution is now the "settled will" of the Welsh people. Just 29 per cent would be sorry if the Assembly were abolished – hardly a ringing endorsement – while 18 per cent would be pleased and 43 per cent would be neither pleased nor sorry. Nevertheless, they do show that Welsh public opinion is strongly in favour of an increase in the powers of the Assembly.

As Wyn Jones and Scully note, it is a paradox that while "the Welsh electorate

appear distinctly under-whelmed by the experience of devolution so far, the Welsh electorate have developed an appetite for more devolution rather than less, with the plurality of voters now supporting a more powerful parliament with legislative and tax-varying powers." They explain this paradox by suggesting that, while approval of what the Assembly has actually done is fairly weak, there has, nevertheless, been a growth in diffuse support for the principle of devolution since 1999, especially amongst those who did not previously feel a strong sense of Welsh national identity. Devolution has come to be accepted in Wales, if perhaps unenthusiastically, and the main argument is now over the form it should take.

With the exception of Llew Smith the contributors to Welsh Politics Come of Age are generally sympathetic to the Richard proposals. Much of the book does little more than dot the 'i's and cross the 't's of the report. It is a pity that the book is so short of comparative evidence, in particular, from Germany, a country on which Charlie Jeffery, one of the contributors, is an expert. The Welsh model of devolution, dividing primary powers in London from secondary powers devolved to Cardiff, was first advocated by the Kilbrandon Commission, on the basis of an analogy with German experience, which in fact it misunderstood. Moreover, when Kilbrandon reported in 1973, Germany was still enjoying an economic miracle, partly, it was thought, due to the consensus politics generated by federalism. Now, of course, things are quite different, and Germany has set up a commission to consider how the federal system can be made to yield greater accountability. This is to escape from Politikverflechtung – a system of government so interlocked that it is difficult to pinpoint accountability on anyone for anything. There is, surely, much food for thought here for those interested in devolution in Wales.

Despite these drawbacks *Welsh Politics Come of Age* provides a clear and accurate summary of the Richard recommendations and of the debate which has followed the report. It is rounded off with a flourish by a stimulating and provocative chapter by Director of the Institute of Welsh Affairs John Osmond on the implications of Richard for coalition politics in Wales. For Osmond, "Welsh politics will come of age when the Welsh electorate have

lived through the experience of changing their government." But, if there is ever to be an alternative government in Wales, the other parties will have to learn to co-operate together to produce an alternative programme. It is highly unlikely that either the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats or Plaid Cymru will be able to form a government on their own in Wales in the foreseeable future. There is unlikely to be a two-party alternation of power in Wales as there is at Westminster. Therefore, the only way in which Labour can be displaced from government in Cardiff Bay is through a three-party coalition.

Osmond sees the germ of such a coalition in a commitment to the Richard recommendations, seeking, against Labour, primary powers for Wales, STV, a reduction in the number of Welsh MPs at Westminster and perhaps even tax-raising powers. His argument was supported in an important speech by Nick Bourne, leader of the Welsh Conservatives in the National Assembly, on 9 March to the Welsh Governance Centre at Cardiff University. Nevertheless, such a coalition looks unlikely at present since the Conservatives, despite Nick Bourne, oscillate between wanting to run the Assembly and to abolish it.

Meanwhile, Plaid Cymru still finds it difficult to decide whether to help make devolution work, or to prove that it cannot work so as to encourage support for separatism. At times, the party seems to be performing both roles simultaneously.

For an alternative government to be possible in Wales, the three non-Labour parties will have to unlearn the habits of Westminster politics and develop conscious coalition strategies, as they have in some of the Welsh counties. This involves a search for common ground. Can the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru really come to abandon the deep-seated habits of mind associated with decades of Westminster politics? Despite Osmond's optimism, this prospect still appears somewhat distant. To this, no doubt prejudiced English observer, it looks as if it may well take some considerable period of time before Welsh politics finally comes of age. Until that happens, this book can safely be recommended as an excellent guide to the ongoing debate..

- *Vernon Bogdanor is Professor of Government at Oxford University. He is a member of the committee administering the Economic and Social Research Council's Devolution and Constitutional Change Programme, joint publisher with the IWA of* Welsh Politics Come of Age: Responses to the Richard Commission, *available from the IWA at £14.99*

an alternative government

nick bourne argues that the opposition parties in the National Assembly need to entertain the idea of coalition

There are several reasons why the public remains sceptical about the Assembly. One of these reasons is that, despite the poor performance of the government, there exists the perception that there is no real prospect of change. This may in part explain the almost universal identification of the Welsh Assembly Government with the institution itself, the National Assembly for Wales. It is not, perhaps, an issue that exercises the minds of the public on a daily basis, but I do believe there is a latent feeling of despondency eating away at the legitimacy of the Assembly. An apparent one-party state is unhealthy for Welsh democracy.

Welsh Conservatives have a responsibility to grapple with the important issues facing Wales today and one of those key issues is that of Assembly powers. Of course, vital issues such as health, education, the economy and culture occupy most of our time, but constitutional questions are also crucial.

On the Richard Commission's recommendations on increasing the Assembly's legislative powers the most sensible road ahead is for the people of Wales to decide in a referendum – or 'preferendum'. A Conservative government will ask the electorate to indicate their preference from a series of options, including abolition, the status quo and a primary law-making Parliament.

My own preference is for a legislative Parliament, although not necessarily within the time-scale suggested by Lord Richard. The Latin caution 'festina lente' (hasten slowly) is appropriate here. Allowing the Assembly time to bed in has always seemed to me to be the wisest course of action. I think that it is desirable that there are at least three Assembly terms before such a change is brought about.

I believe that the current settlement is ultimately untenable and it would be difficult to argue for the status quo in the long term. But I also believe there is little thirst for going back to the old system. Opinion polls have demonstrated that the electorate is generally supportive of powers on subject areas like health, education, rural affairs and culture, residing in Cardiff rather than Westminster. Welsh political topography has changed and I do not believe that it would assist the Welsh Conservative Party to maintain that the world is flat when clearly it is not.

It is worth noting that an enormous amount of time, money and effort have been invested in the Assembly, not just within the narrow confines of the Assembly buildings in Cathays Park and Cardiff Bay, but also by industry, charities and throughout public life – for example, in our universities, schools and hospitals. Nor can I ignore that Welsh Conservatives have fared well in a devolved Wales. I do not base my views on enlightened self-interest but I would be foolish in the extreme to ignore this dimension.

In his St David's Lecture to the Welsh Governance Centre three years ago, Paul Murphy, the then Secretary of State for Wales, said "the greatest

Sitting together in the National Assembly has given the opposition parties an opportunity to at least get to know one another: "In the debating chamber, opposition parties often work together and have exploited rare opportunities to defeat Welsh Labour."

protection the Assembly will ever have will be its reputation." I agree. Three years later and the Assembly's reputation is still very much in question but it is Labour that is pushing the self-destruct button. It is Labour's record I believe that is damaging the Assembly's reputation both on substantive policy issues like the health service and also on matters of process like committee scrutiny.

Openness and accountability are key selling points for devolution. Indeed, in 1998, Rhodri Morgan said, "The Assembly belongs to the people, not the Welsh establishment". Despite the stated good intentions of the Assembly government, democracy has not been well served by an increasingly complacent ruling party. Particularly since Labour has won a working majority (albeit slim), they have demonstrated considerable arrogance in their handling of Assembly business. They have reduced the frequency of committee meetings and tended to stifle debate in plenary.

On the policy front, it often seems that devolution has failed to make substantial differences. This has not been helped by a reliance on headline grabbing gimmicks. They may work for an election but they do not bring about real long-term benefits. To give two typical examples – on education, it has emerged that the 'free' breakfast initiative for 'every' primary school pupil was only ever intended for one child in every ten and the costs have soared. On health, the promise of 'free' prescriptions is still little more than a pledge. Meanwhile, the weighty issues of school and university funding, hospital waiting lists and the level of council tax remain major concerns. Serious political will is required to make a positive impact on these important issues. I realise I speak from a position of opposition but these are widely held views. Knock on any door in Wales and the devolved issues likely to be raised are health, council tax and the state of education.

Rhodri Morgan argues that our Welshness means we should shun choice in public services – he maintains that choice does not fit with the Welsh character. For the Assembly government, this means foundation hospitals and specialist schools are not an option, despite the actions of their colleagues in Westminster. I do not believe that the people of Wales are pre-occupied with ideology, rather they want high-quality and efficient public services. It is not characteristically Welsh to be the sick man of Europe, or, indeed, the poor man of the United Kingdom. That is, however, the situation we are in. There is a real need for an alternative agenda.

The possibility of coalition stems essentially from Labour's failures to

make devolution a success and bring about the changes needed for the people of Wales. Labour dominance is now being challenged at Westminster and at local authority level. Indeed, the local government elections of 2004, when Labour polled 35.7 per cent of the vote, may well be a portent for the future. In the 2003 Assembly elections, Labour polled around 38 per cent. There still persists the psyche, however, not only among Labour members, that there is no viable alternative in the Assembly. No other party singly is currently able to take on the strength of the Labour machine in Wales and govern on its own. But there is a need for competitive politics.

Voter apathy is a major problem in Western democracies. Turnout in the last Assembly elections was only 38 per cent, a fall of 8 per cent since 1999. Entrenched Labour government and perpetual opposition for the other parties creates stale and uninviting politics. It is little wonder there is no clamour for more powers for the Assembly among the Welsh people. Competitive politics would raise standards in all political parties. Labour's monopoly is unhealthy, undesirable and does not serve the cause of devolution.

There is undoubtedly a need for the prospect of a change in government in Wales. Sadly, the only question seems to be whether Labour can rule alone or with the help of the Liberal Democrats. Is the idea of a government in the Assembly without Labour inconceivable? What of the opposition parties and the prospects for working together?

The presence of an Assembly has not created an enthusiasm to vote nationalist. Support for Plaid Cymru dwindled at the 2003 Assembly election and the party does not pose a major threat to Labour power. The Liberal Democrats have flatlined and have the smallest representation in the Assembly, if John Marek AM of Forward Wales will forgive me.

I am the first to boast about the strides we have made as a party, but it is unrealistic to expect Welsh Conservatives to be able to form a government alone in the near future. Complicated mathematical formulae create many different permutations; few, however, throw up the likelihood of sole Conservative governance in Wales (not yet anyway), or indeed sole Plaid Cymru or Liberal Democrat governance.

This means we should examine the merits of working together. This may well be a long term project, but if people can see politicians putting issues ahead of narrow party interests then I believe the Welsh public will respond enthusiastically. They will be keen to support both our policies and, importantly, the Assembly as an institution. There are many areas where we can work together with other opposition parties, including health, education, housing, rural affairs and the Welsh language. It is easy for us all to seek refuge in ideological purity, to refer endlessly to the past and not the future, but that will not move Wales forward. Political parties after all encompass many opinions as any politician can testify. For the Welsh Conservatives, working together would present an opportunity to implement some of our cherished Conservative ideals.

This will be a difficult prospect – perhaps a long-term prospect – and it can only start by greater co-operation. This has begun to good effect. In the debating chamber, opposition parties often work together and have exploited rare opportunities to defeat Labour, on the Business Statement and the First Minister's Annual Report for example. I believe the Welsh electorate will be more likely to follow the argument presented by the Richard Commission if they could engage more readily with the Assembly and were presented with the prospect of an alternative government in Wales. Labour hegemony must be tested and one way to do this is to entertain the idea of opposition collaboration.

- *Nick Bourne is Leader of the Welsh Conservatives in the National Assembly. This is an edited excerpt from the Welsh Governance Centre St David's Day annual lecture he gave at Cardiff University in March.*

adam price says that with its permanent majority the Assembly is replicating Westminster's 'conformity of indivisible power'

democratic deficit

Devolution was meant to be the catalyst for a new politics. It was meant to address the democratic deficit of falling turnouts and disillusionment with a Government that was over-bearing and remote. It was going to change the relationship between the government and the governed. What is clear now is that devolution has not transformed the culture of politics. It has simply shown up its weaknesses.

The Assembly, like the Westminster Parliament, is largely powerless against an unchecked executive. Elected members see themselves as bound by the party line, not as individual representatives following their conscience or the interests of their constituents. Centralism, spin and the urge to control remain the hallmarks of political style.

The inclusivity which was meant to be one of the design principles of the Assembly has been long forgotten in the rush to the comforting familiarity of the Westminster model. But instead of resulting in a separation of powers, as is often argued, the result has been a further concentration in the hands of the executive.

To understand the confusion you have to go back into parliamentary history. Separation of powers was first mooted by Clement Walker, a member of the Long Parliament in 1648, as a guarantee against the kind of arbitrary, tyrannical rule against which the governed had to be protected. The remedy he suggested lay in a separation of governmental functions between 'the Governing power', 'the Legislative power', and 'the Judicative power'.

What subsequently developed was a constitutional system, in which King and Parliament were limited by the authority of the other, the system of checks and balances lauded by Montesqieu and admired by the framers of the American constitution. However, with the growth of prime ministerial power the executive has increasingly dominated the legislature, and to some extent the judiciary, because of its monopoly over the law-making process.

So in slavishly adopting a parliamentary model, the Assembly has imported all the worst features of the Westminster charade: the near-complete concentration of power in the hands of the executive, with an Assembly symbolically important, but in reality increasingly irrelevant.

The most bitter betrayal of all of the new politics we thought we were building must be the calculated attack we have seen on the idea of proportional representation: "The absence of first-past-the-post in Wales and Scotland will by itself promote a more pluralistic politics since it will be less easy for a single party to secure an overall majority, and so will encourage government by partnership." So said the Secretary of State in 2000 about an electoral system he now describes as fatally flawed.

For all the hopeful talk of plugging the democratic deficit, of building a

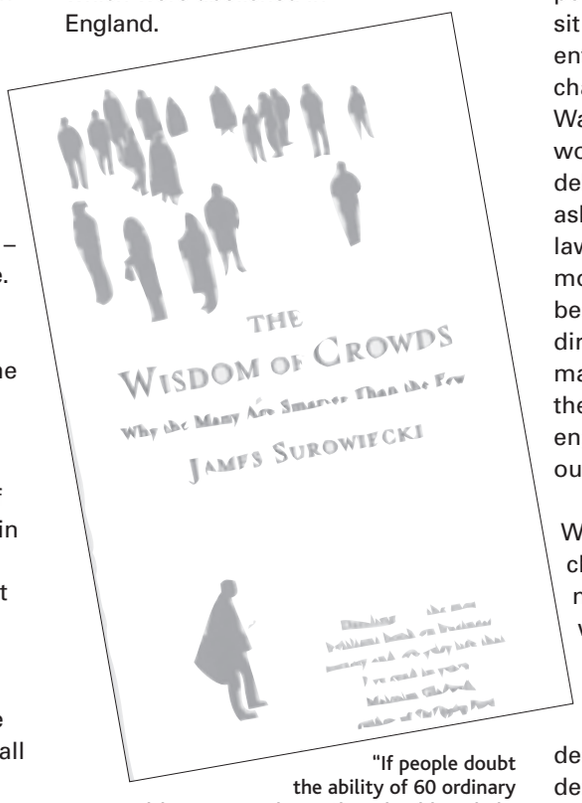
laboratory of democracy, we are still concentrating in the hands of the few all the short-term authority taken from the many. Instead of the radical experimentalism of a decentred democracy, with its overlapping and competing sovereignties, we have the conformity and single-mindedness of indivisible power and a permanent majority. What I would call, half jokingly, though only half, the dictatorship of the Cabinet secretariat.

If I sound a little negative, it's because I think we are in a very negative phase in Welsh politics, when quangos are abolished, New Labour nostrums roundly rejected, but nobody's very clear about what we're going to put in their place. The few policy innovations of the Welsh Assembly Government – free prescriptions, free breakfasts and free swimming lessons – are, at best, very modest in their scope.

As Rosa Luxemburg wrote in the context of the Russian revolution, "The negative, the tearing down can be decreed; the building up, the positive cannot." Kafka, I think, captured the same sense of dejection that many of us who campaigned for the Yes vote in 1997 now inevitably feel, "The revolution has evaporated and all that remains is the mud of a new bureaucracy."

So how can we reverse our own slide into bureaucratic centralism? First of all we could extend and deepen democracy throughout the public sphere, and adopt the American practice of directly electing a much wider array of public officials. American citizens elect virtually everyone, from the district attorney, to the chief of police, the head of the fire department, and the local school board. Coupled with the recall principle, this produces a much greater sense of real accountability.

In the light of the appalling failures of representative democracy to get to grips with the crisis in the NHS, there is a strong case for introducing a participatory element through electing the chairs of the local health boards. This is preferable to the elections for foundation hospital trusts being trialled in England because ordinary people don't want a say in how hospitals are run. Their objective is that the hospital delivers the goods and services they want. And it's creating a democratically elected body to plan services that's key to that, rather than re-establishing the pre-NHS voluntary hospital principle, or retaining the powerless community health councils which were abolished in England.



"If people doubt the ability of 60 ordinary Welsh women and men they should read *The Wisdom of Crowds* by James Surowiecki. Groups of ordinary people are smarter than individual experts, no matter how brilliant".

Where elections are not possible, we could consider appointing independent public interest guardians to public bodies chosen by the relevant Assembly subject committee. On the permanent staff, paid for and responsible only to the Assembly, they would have the same right to information and presence as any other member of the board. Their responsibility would be to report on and evaluate performance against the public interest – as a sort of permanent whistle-blower with privileged access to internal documents and discussions. In this way we might have avoided the communications breakdown that appeared to build up in the run-up to the WDA's demise. This to my mind would be a far better guarantee of transparency and accountability than taking an agency inside Government.

More radical still perhaps, would be the idea of a Citizen's Assembly: sixty people, chosen randomly like a jury, to sit for a month as a committee of the entire nation, a radical revising chamber, representing every part of Wales, all walks of life. How would it work? Well, using the techniques of deliberative democracy they could be asked to decide whether to pass into law certain Assembly initiatives – no more than one or two – which had been referred to them by a third of the directly elected Assembly members. It may seem a pretty bold idea. But, with the collapse in trust and popular engagement, we need to start using our imaginative faculties.

We will soon have an empty debating chamber in Crickhowell House. Why not use it to let the people in. I think it would reconnect people to our democracy. People would identify with ordinary people weighing up the pros and cons of difficult decisions in a 'big brother house' of democracy. And if people doubt the ability of 60 ordinary Welsh women and men they should read *The Wisdom of Crowds* by James Surowiecki. Groups of ordinary people are smarter than individual experts, no matter how brilliant. They are better at solving problems, fostering innovation, coming to wise decisions, and even predicting the future.

- *Adam Price is Plaid Cymru MP for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr. This is an edited excerpt from a lecture he gave to the Regeneration Institute, Cardiff University in January 2005.*

seats and votes

john cox argues for 'enabling legislation' to implement Richard and says STV is key to maximising turn out in Assembly elections

The Richard Commission made three major recommendations to improve the governance of Wales:

- A legislative Assembly with more powers – it judged the current settlement to be "unsustainable".
- To raise the number of AMs to 80 – the current 60 being judged (already) too few for effective scrutiny and for the anticipated future extra duties.
- To replace the unpopular AMS electoral system by the Single Transferable Vote (STV).

These proposals were met with less than enthusiasm by Labour MPs at Westminster, though to be charitable, many of their reservations are about the timing rather than the principles of the changes. Assuming, as a working hypothesis, that their concerns are genuine and have merit, the challenge is to legislate for the non-contentious proposals without foreclosing those that the MPs currently consider premature.

This could be done by 'enabling legislation', to allow the National Assembly, at its leisure, to decide when each provision is activated. This would follow the precedent set for Scotland that enables their Parliament to decide when or if to activate tax-varying powers without requiring further permission from Westminster.

In principle, a new Government of Wales Act could 'enable' the National Assembly to activate any section of the Richard Commission's recommendations, with the proviso that two thirds of the AMs must be in favour. A two-thirds majority is a political statement disguised as a numerical hurdle. It ensures that the leading political party controls the pace of devolution – but does not allow any single minority party to block its progress.

Once the Commission's proposals are on the statute book awaiting activation by a two-thirds consensus in the National Assembly, there will be no need for more legislation. In particular, this will strengthen the hand of the Assembly in the event of a future London government being unsympathetic to Welsh aspirations.

This legislative strategy could take much heat out of the current debate. It would aid the passage of non-contentious legislative proposals by designating all contentious issues as requiring a two thirds majority before they can be activated. This ought to be politically acceptable to all but those implacably opposed to devolution.

The number of AMs also could be dealt with by 'enabling legislation' – leaving it at 60 for the next Assembly election but, empowering the National Assembly, when a two-thirds majority agree from their experience that more are needed, to increase the number up to 80. The alternative, freezing the number at 60, could prove disastrous.

If, as the Commission suggests, a National Assembly of 60 members proves inadequate to cope with their extra duties and needs to ask Westminster for legislation to raise the number, it could take two more terms to enact. With the public less than impressed already by the National Assembly, delay could prove fatal to its credibility.

The low public esteem of politicians is, without doubt, why no-one dare call for

more AMs in an election year – even though this proposal may prove essential to help overcome the problem. The Commission identified the existing workload as a reason for the AMs' current under-performance and it is improbable that any improvement is possible whilst they have to spread their talents over four to six subject committees.

There is no impediment to having 80 AMs elected by the current additional member system (AMS) – but the consequences would be unpalatable for the Labour Party. Unless their votes jump from 38 to 48 per cent on the regional lists, Labour cannot hope to win an overall majority. It so happens, however, that the adoption of STV would be advantageous to Labour and, although not a valid argument in favour of STV, it is a pragmatic reason why Labour may prefer STV over the AMS alternative.

In a nutshell, STV is likely to increase voting turnout. An unsung advantage of STV is that it ensures that the votes cast better represent the political will of the electorate. In the context of Welsh politics, this will increase the voting share of the Labour Party and has the potential to improve its prospects of winning an overall majority.

Low voting turn out is not a side-issue for devolution. It undermines its most compelling justification, to redress the democratic deficit from 18 years of rule by unpopular Westminster governments. It is ironic that these governments of the Thatcher era all won 22-25 per cent of the Welsh electorate vote (29-31 per cent voted Conservative in Wales on 76-80 per cent turnouts), half as much again as the 16 per cent who voted for the current Welsh Assembly Government. In 2003 Labour won 42 per cent of the vote on a 38 per cent turnout.

By the criterion of popular mandate, Rhodri Morgan has even less legitimacy than John Redwood. Unless this is addressed, the continued existence of the National Assembly and a devolved Welsh government must remain in doubt. The Richard Commission recommendation for STV is a pre-requisite for increased voting turnout (though not itself a guarantee that it will materialise). Examining our current voting systems the wonder is that even a paltry 40 per cent bother to vote.

In the recent General Election, as for the National Assembly, the results were enevitable in all but (at the most) eight constituencies, that is to say for 80 per cent of the Welsh electorate. In the National Assembly elections in 2003 every regional vote for Labour was wasted whilst, in the constituencies, over 60 per cent voted for losing candidates. In short, over 80 per cent might just as well have stayed at home and, for those who did vote, more than 60 per cent will be disappointed with the outcome. Our current voting systems might have been designed to discourage participation.

STV addresses both these issues. It ensures, for three-plus member constituencies, at least 75 per cent of the voters will vote for a winning candidate and so take some comfort from the result. Moreover, it ensures that there is a genuine contest in every constituency, even in places like Cynon Valley and Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney.

It is no accident that, as shown in Figure 1, the turnout in the 2003 Assembly election in the 24 safe Labour seats was, on average, ten per cent less than the 16 contested seats. The chart shows this by listing the Welsh constituencies in their sequence, from the lowest turnout, Alyn and Deeside, which was below 25 per cent, to the highest, Ynys Môn, above 50 per cent. The shaded horizontal bars (on the right) show which party won the seat and, only if the contest was close, the runner-up party (on the left).

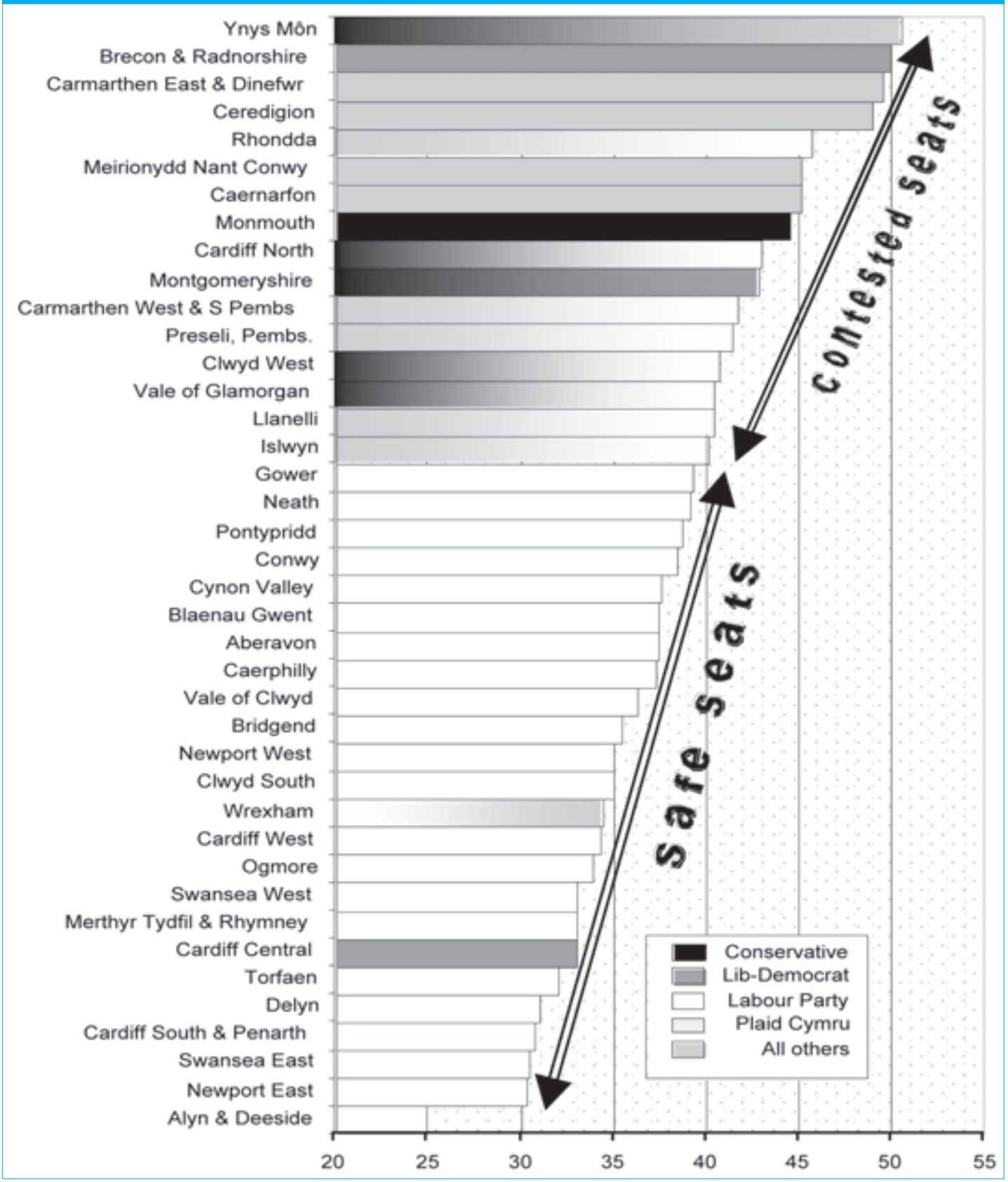
Of the top ten seats for turnout, Labour won only two, Rhondda and Cardiff North. In contrast, only two of the bottom thirty constituencies were won by the opposition, Cardiff Central and Wrexham. The inescapable conclusion, unpalatable as it may be for the Opposition parties, is that the votes understate Labour's true support. This is because, over most of Wales, its supporters have no incentive to vote. While it is usual to blame our disproportional voting system for giving Labour too many seats, a fairer criticism would be that it gives Labour too few votes. What both Labour and Welsh democracy needs, is a voting system that encourages more people to vote, not only those fortunate enough to live in a marginal constituency.

At the last Assembly election more than 60 per cent voted for losing candidates. Not only that, we have an extraordinary outcome that the leading party is unrepresented across 70 per cent of the geographical area of Wales. This is because Labour AMs are all constituency members and the party has no representation on the List. In contrast, the Opposition members can cherry pick issues and target constituencies for the next election, an injustice inherent in the flawed AMS voting system.

The fundamental defect of AMS is that it creates two antagonistic types of AM. To its detriment Labour has become obsessed with the Clwyd West anomaly, in which all four party candidates became AMs, since the three 'losers' reappeared on the North Wales List. The result is that it seems content to stamp on this relatively trivial nuisance and fail to grasp the opportunity, afforded by the Richard Commission, to scrap AMS completely.

Given that Labour failed to win an overall majority in 2003, even with AMS and with the Opposition in

% voting turnout in May 2003



number of members per stv constituancy

STV constituencies based on local authority boundaries	Electorate	Number of AMs depending on size of Assembly			
		Members			
		60	67	73	80
Newport	104,240	3	3	3	4
Torfaen and Monmouthshire	137,429	4	4	5	5
Caerphilly	132,864	3	4	4	5
Merthyr and Blaenau Gwent	96,345	3	3	3	3
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	162,323	4	5	5	6
Cardiff	238,894	6	7*	8*	8*
Bridgende	101,675	3	3	3	4
The Vale of Glamorgan	88,994	2e	3	3	3
Neath Port Talbot	107,566	3	3	4	4
Swansea	177,105	5	5	6	6
Carmarthenshire	134,487	3	4	4	5
Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion	142,252	4	4	5	5
Gwynedd and Ynys Mon	141,991	4	4	5	5
Denbighshire and Conwy	154,899	4	5	5	6
Flintshire	114,932	3	4	4	4
Wrexham	96,835	3	3	3	3
Powys	100,371	3	3	3	4
Totals	2,233,202	60	67	73	80

Notes:
* Cardiff has to be sub-divided when the entitlement exceeds 6
e The Vale of Glamorgan has to be paired with Bridgend if its entitlement is less than three.

disarray, it is astonishing that the party remains unconvinced of the advantages of STV. It eliminates every anomaly of AMS, and not just its Clwyd West obsession. If STV were adopted for the 2007 election for a 60-member National Assembly it would be likely that Labour would win an overall majority. Certainly, the party has nothing to lose from STV, and the higher turn out it would produce would enhance both the credibility and legitimacy of the National Assembly itself.

Sadly, to ensure unanimity, the Commission fudged their recommendation in relation to its implementation. Rather than base the STV constituencies on the local authority boundaries, and so allowing the National Assembly to decide the timetable, they left open an alternative option of utilising obsolete Westminster constituencies. This left the unelected Boundary Commission in control of its implementation. To simplify and speed up the process, any new legislation should specify that all STV constituencies are to elect three to six members according to five simple rules, to be administered by the National Assembly:

1. Divide the latest total Welsh electorate by the pre-determined desired number of AMs to obtain the average electorate/AM ratio.
2. Divide each local authority electorate by this ratio to obtain the entitlement to AMs of each authority ('rounded' to the nearest whole number).
3. For authorities whose entitlement is above 6, sub-divide this authority into two roughly equal constituencies based on local ward boundaries to return 3-6 AMs.
4. For authorities whose entitlement is below 3, pair with a nearby local authority to create a single STV constituency to return three to six AMs.
5. If the total number of AMs calculated above does not match the number desired by the National Assembly (due to 'rounding' errors), adjust the ratio until it does.

Using this enabling legislation, the next National Assembly could be elected by STV for any number of AMs between 60 and 80 and would not require extra updated legislation whenever the Boundary Commission alters a Westminster constituency. The table illustrates what is feasible using the local authority boundaries if, in their wisdom, the National Assembly decided to retain 60 AMs or increase the number to 67, 73 or 80. Once the latest electoral rolls become available, the allocation of AMs to each STV constituency may be calculated in microseconds.

The legislative process will be much simplified if, rather than rewriting the recommendations of the Richard Commission and second-guessing what may be a future consensus on implementation priorities, the recommendations are all included in the new legislation for implementation either immediately, or when by a two-thirds majority, the National Assembly determines the time is right. This approach could remove the bitterness of some recent debate and restore the remarkable unanimity achieved by the Richard Commission.

The recent General Election was a useful reminder that we cannot rely on all future Westminster governments being sympathetic to Welsh aspirations. To ensure that Wales is able to control the pace of further devolution, the Richard Commission package, in its entirety, needs to be placed on the statute book as "enabling legislation". A two thirds majority in the National Assembly should be all that is needed to implement each of its components.

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swimming in clear red water

david morris explains why Welsh Labour activists have formed a new 'grassroots' organisation

The establishment of the Assembly in 1999 did more than construct a new tier of government: it created a space in which a distinctive Welsh politics could develop. It represented not just a decentralisation of decision-making, but an opportunity to design policies and structures that suited the needs and interests of Wales and its people.

However, in many respects the path of devolved politics since 1999 has diverged too little from the worst of Westminster. Through a combination of limited powers, meagre ambitions and the baleful influence of spin doctors, the Assembly has too often become fixated on trivia, rather than on ideas and initiatives that might materially improve people's lives. Against this background, Rhodri Morgan's famous 'clear red water' speech, delivered at Swansea University in December 2002, stands out as an attempt to raise the level of political debate. It was an effort to present a coherent political philosophy as the basis of Welsh Labour's governmental programme: a democratic socialist agenda built on Welsh popular traditions of social solidarity.

As concrete examples of this agenda, Rhodri pointed to the number of public services made free at the point of use by his government – bus travel for pensioners and the disabled, access to museums and galleries, free prescriptions for those under 25 or over 60, as well as to the scrapping of league tables and SATs for seven-year-olds, the 'Communities First' social inclusion agenda, and so on. It is significant that Rhodri was immediately attacked in vitriolic terms by both Nick Bourne and Ieuan Wyn Jones – the former seeing an identifiable ideological enemy, the latter no doubt fearing a loss of his party's appeal to disillusioned Labour voters. More recently, 'clear red water' has been derided by Labour's opponents as an ideological obstacle to the solution of problems such as NHS waiting times (they are slower to link it to obviously popular policies like free bus travel). In that 2002 speech, however, Rhodri did what no-one else in the post-devolution period has done He articulated a general vision of what the *substance* of Welsh politics – rather than its governmental *form* – should be.

The 'clear red water' speech also provided a spur to the creation of a new centre-left activists' network within the Wales Labour Party, Welsh Labour Grassroots. Starting from a low base, it now has members in a dozen constituency Labour parties, from Cardiff to Carmarthen to Conwy, and has held a number of successful meetings, which have been addressed by speakers such as Edwina Hart AM, John Griffiths AM, Christine Chapman AM, and Martin Caton MP. Two of our members are on the Welsh Labour Executive Committee. Our starting-point is that the 'clear red water' agenda of Welsh Labour is something to be welcomed and actively supported, to the extent that it embraces the progressive traditions of the Welsh labour movement, and thereby distances itself from the 'New Labour' politics of Tony Blair.

The obvious question is, if the Welsh Labour leadership is seeking to pursue policies with which we broadly agree,

why bother establishing an activists' network, independent of the party's official channels? Why not simply become the most loyal foot-soldiers in the party's ranks? There are a number of reasons why an organised, grassroots centre-left is still needed – indeed, now more than ever.

The first reason is simply that, as British citizens and Labour party members, we are subject not only to the decisions of Rhodri Morgan and his colleagues, but to those of Tony Blair. And, while New Labour at Westminster has introduced many progressive policies, such as the national minimum wage, the 'Fairness at Work' legislation, reform (however limited) of the House of Lords, and of course, the introduction of Scottish and Welsh devolution, these have increasingly been outweighed by measures that have dismayed party members and supporters. These include PFI, foundation hospitals, university top-up fees and – worst of all – Britain's active and uncritical participation in the US 'war on terrorism'. In common with activists in England and Scotland, we refuse to accept that Blair has any right to use our party as a vehicle for his right-wing policies, which have contributed to a collapse in party membership from 405,000 to 190,000 since 1997.

The second reason has to do with the limits of the devolution settlement, and the consequent ability of the British Labour leadership to curtail the Assembly Government's freedom of manoeuvre. To take just one example: Edwina Hart, as Assembly minister responsible for housing, has expressed her personal support for local authorities to be able to borrow money to improve housing stock, on the same terms as housing associations. However, she concedes that she can do no more than petition Gordon Brown to relax rules that are set in Westminster.

Such issues mean that the supporters of the 'clear red water' agenda cannot be agnostic on the need for a strengthening of the devolution settlement. Only when the Assembly has primary law-making powers (and preferably tax-raising powers) will it be able to pass 'made in Wales' legislation to deliver its 'made in Wales' policies. Rhodri Morgan and his colleagues may have accepted a

Edwina Hart, Social Justice Minister in the Welsh Assembly Government, "concedes that she can do no more than petition Gordon Brown to relax rules that are set in Westminster."

tactical pause in the devolution process, but grassroots party activists need to be ready to push things forward when the opportunity arises.

The third reason for a grassroots centre-left, is that ordinary party members cannot afford to rely too heavily on their leaders. Even the best-intentioned and clearest-thinking of them can be diverted. Moreover, the Welsh leadership are under constant pressure from Westminster to follow a more orthodox 'New Labour' line. Activists who support the principle of 'clear red water' need to be able to apply countervailing pressure from below, to try and ensure that Welsh Labour keeps to its chosen path.

Welsh Labour Grassroots aims to act as a critical friend to our elected representatives: loyally supportive when they deliver sound policies, but unafraid to speak up – and to promote our own alternatives – when they do not. In any case, the model of progressive policies being handed down from above by an enlightened leadership is neither a very democratic nor ultimately a very realistic one. The ideas and aspirations that have driven real social progress have always emerged from impassioned debate within the labour movement and popular organisations, proceeding from the bottom up. Such debate has been lacking within the party in the Blair period – partly due to the departure of many long standing activists, partly to the way that political debate has been displaced by focus group politics. There is a need for open and unconstrained policy debate that engages members at all levels of the party.

This leads to the final reason for Welsh Labour Grassroot's existence. If there is to be a real debate, then the structures of the party need to become more open, accessible and transparent. The Policy Forum process – the official channel through which party bodies are given an input into policy-making – allows for discussion on only a limited set of questions. It is also subject to a predetermined timetable, which sees the Assembly manifesto gradually developed over a four year period.

Discussion of the Forum documents dominates the annual conference agenda, allowing only limited space for debate over resolutions from constituency parties and affiliates on the pressing issues of the day. Welsh Labour Grassroots wants to encourage a more inclusive and animated debate, extending to issues that currently fall through the holes in the party's agenda. In the first instance, we want to see better use made of the existing forums for debate. In some areas we are pushing

In his 'Clear Red Water' speech Rhodri Morgan "did what no-one else in the post-devolution period has done. He articulated a general vision of what the substance of Welsh politics – rather than its governmental form – should be."

for a relaxation of rules that can stifle free discussion – for example, a widening of the scope for debate at Welsh conference, to allow non-devolved matters to be discussed where they clearly affect Wales.

The role that Welsh Labour Grassroots has chosen for itself involves being part of a British-wide Labour opposition to Blairism, while simultaneously providing a voice in support of the 'clear red water' agenda in Wales. We want to contribute to a rejuvenation of participatory democracy within the Labour party and the development of a radical socialist policy programme.

The positive response we have received from longstanding Labour activists in all parts of Wales has made us increasingly confident about our ability to put our ideas and concerns on the political agenda. We have also been pursuing specific concerns over issues like housing stock transfer, defence of public services, challenging the BNP and improving the political representation of black and Asian people.

We may not win all the battles, but we will at least ensure that a clear socialist voice is heard. And in so doing, we believe we can offer something to Labour activists who oppose the Blair agenda. People who prefer the *Welsh* agenda but don't know how they fit in to Labour at the UK level. We can offer a positive reason for staying in the party.

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broadcasting barricades

sue balsom on Ofcom's medium term rescue package for ITV1 Wales

In February, Ofcom concluded the most radical investigation of TV services for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland since devolution. As the year-long review progressed, the status of the devolved nations assumed increasing significance. In particular, the review brought sharply into focus non-news regional programming broadcast by ITV1 Wales, Scottish Media Group (SMG) and Ulster Television (UTV).

Historically, ITV franchises were awarded primarily on the basis of the geography that determined the pattern of analogue transmission. In exchange for once scarce broadcast spectrum, and the right to exploit it commercially, ITV franchisees pay the Government substantial licence fees. As part of this compact, each licence also requires an agreed number of 'must carry' hours of public service content for local audiences. Other regulated public service content for the ITV network includes agreed minimum hours of news, current affairs, children's, arts and religious programming.

The previous patchwork of independent TV companies has now been largely consolidated into ITV plc, including HTV Wales, which is the only national franchise within the company's structure. Scotland and Northern Ireland have separate companies, as does Channel (Islands) TV.

The advent of digital television and its rapid take-up has dramatically altered the future value of analogue ITV licences and with it, the potential of Ofcom as the regulator, to require the same amount of PSB programme hours as previously. Consequently, Ofcom's role has been to balance the needs of audiences with the diminishing commercial value of analogue licences and the relative costs to ITV plc of providing obligatory, 'must carry' public service programmes, including non-news regional programming for each of its 12 licence areas.

To resolve these tensions Ofcom proposed an immediate halving of ITV's obligation for non-news regional programming for the English regions – three hours per week down to one and a half. However, for the nations, the final report recommended retaining four hours of non-news programming – that is, just 30 minutes per week less than at present – reducing to three hours as digital switchover kicks in.

In all this, it should be noted that Ofcom never proposed a reduction in ITV1 Wales's five and a half hours of local news. Indeed this continued requirement has been written into ITV's new digital licence until 2014.

Elsewhere on the news front, Ofcom received an innovative proposal from the Scottish Media group to insert Scottish items in the main 10.30pm UK news programme. As part of the current, third, phase of its consultation, Ofcom has now asked whether similar provision for Wales and Northern Ireland would be welcomed and responses from Wales are awaited with interest.

Understandably, during the public service broadcasting review attention in Wales focused on likely reductions by ITV1 Wales. Following the final report, as long as the analogue provision continues, viewers will hopefully enjoy well resourced English language non-news ITV programming for Wales. However, by far the more challenging question is, who will deliver such programmes in the longer term and what future regulatory measures will need to be deployed to ensure Wales's local public service broadcasting needs? Ofcom wants to ensure competition to deliver quality in public service content for Wales, as well as on the UK networks.

BBC Wales is already developing an exciting range of local television, red button and new media services. Arguably the debate should also now shift to the viability of new commercial models for additional, innovative digital programme content, and whether these new models could operate at an all-Wales, as well as a very local level.

The cost of creating new digital commercial TV channels is falling rapidly and the potential for associated broadband broadcast is huge. Ofcom plans to scope new local television possibilities in a report later this year, but the sooner players in Wales can start thinking beyond current provision, the better.

Meanwhile, Ofcom's third consultation report also included a host of other recommendations that have been welcomed in Wales, especially by independent TV production companies. For example, Ofcom has required ITV plc to increase the amount of out-of London production and budgets to 50 per cent of the whole. Some £17 million will therefore immediately shift to non-metropolitan production companies this year, rising to around £40 million in 2006. The BBC is also being encouraged to increase the percentage of programmes from independents and to source more network productions (in-house or independents) from the nations, including BBC Wales.

At the same time, ITV is also setting up a £9 million development fund for the next three years to help 'new to network' independents. This money will seed-fund projects and pilot programmes, plus skills training and mentoring. A further priority is to return network production in the nations to levels of the late 1990s, that is an estimated 8 per cent of total ITV network spend. In 2003, only 2 per cent of total network programme spending went to the three nations combined – and almost all of that was in Scotland.

Wales has developed an important, diverse TV production base, largely thanks to S4C. As bilingual companies, strong and creative Welsh independents are in a good position to capitalise on the new English language network openings.

A number of Welsh TV production companies are already in business expansion mode and there are moves for increased commercial cooperation and consolidation. Driven by Economic Development Minister Andrew Davies, the Assembly Government's new £7m Creative Industries Fund will undoubtedly help fuel this trend.

Commercial success by independents could also be the trigger for new public service programme services for Wales, following digital switch-over in 2008.

Ofcom's research has revealed a surprising strength of feeling concerning the lack of representation of Wales, Welsh people and Welsh culture in UK network programmes.

ITV 1 Wales Waterfront political team – licensed to continue entertaining us on Sunday mornings.

Interestingly, for some this was as important, if not more so, than the availability of local programmes. Accordingly, Ofcom is calling for this issue to be addressed by network programme commissioners. Their response will be taken into account when measuring overall public service broadcasting performance.

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  All Ofcom's proposals for Wales, including an on-going discussion about future options for S4C, can be found in the final report and the consultation document about nations and regions on Ofcom's website www.ofcom.org.uk.

tomos grace looks at the role of the Internet in reinforcing Welsh identity

blogging futures

As in the offline world, Llanfair PG lays claim to the world's longest name on the Internet. Dozens of Ioan Gruffudd sites enable fans all over the world to express their adoration. And after a couple of English defeats in the 6 Nations, email is used by Welsh fans to explain the initials of England sponsors 02. But in other less eye-catching ways, the Internet is also a powerful tool for reinforcing aspects of Welsh identity, notably the Welsh language and Welsh communities.

It may seem surprising that the Welsh language can benefit from the Internet. After all, an estimated 80 per cent of all web sites are in English, often including the newest and most innovative content. The growth of English-dominated new technology, with the Internet as an integral part, has undoubtedly contributed to a deterioration of Welsh grammar. The growth of the typed word means that the use of characters not found in the English alphabet such as 'ô' is almost certainly in decline.

Yet in many ways, the Internet can and is being harnessed to support the Welsh language. The advantages to smaller languages come from the medium's unique cost structure. Publishing costs online are much lower than offline, so it is much cheaper to publish a web page than a page of physical newsprint. And even this smaller cost can be shared between multiple users. The open nature of the Internet allows users, with the author's permission, to add to or amend online material. At the same time, distribution costs are close to zero, with the added advantage that the potential market runs to hundreds of millions.

Newcomers to the Welsh language are amongst those benefiting most from the Internet. Learning Welsh is cheaper and easier now than ever before. Learning materials which previously came in the form of CD-Roms, cassettes and books can now be accessed for free on sites such as Coleg Digidol, e-wlpan and the BBC. These sites provide links to programmes for learners on S4C, details of language courses and even a mutation checker. Acen provides a free online radio station for learners, which is considerably easier than in the offline world of limited and expensive frequencies. And the ubiquitous, on-demand nature of the Internet means that anyone, anywhere in the world can start learning the language, and do so at their own pace.

Other online tools apply to Welsh speakers and learners alike. Some simply exploit the low distribution costs of the Internet to make Welsh language services freely and universally available. There are three online English-Welsh dictionaries and several in other languages; the National Library of Wales publishes a list of Welsh biographies in Welsh; and Google, the largest search engine in the world, operates a Welsh language version.

Another group of sites exploits the open nature of the Internet to create Welsh language services which might be uneconomic offline. Wikipedia is the first Welsh language encyclopaedia to be published in over a hundred years. The service is free and relies entirely on the contributions of users. There are now 3,000 entries, on subjects as diverse as Cyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru to Pol Pot, which can be consulted, amended and added-to by any other users. Cynghanedd.com follows the same principle for the writing of cynghanedd, or strict-metre poetry. The first line of the cynghanedd will be published and anyone can contribute subsequent lines. Straeon.com enables aspiring writers to publish extracts of stories online for other users to comment on and make suggestions. On a slightly lighter note, the Internet has also enabled the first ever dictionary of Welsh swear words at rhegiadur.com. This very funny site lists over 500 entries, again relying on contributions from the online community.

The second major contribution of the Internet is in building and sustaining Welsh communities. One example of such a community is the Welsh living outside of Wales, 38 per cent of whom are graduates compared to the 10 per cent inside the country. If Wales is to have a chance of attracting this community back to Wales, these ex-pats must be enabled to retain links with Wales and with other Welsh

people. The Internet greatly facilitates this process. Whether they are based in London or Lilongwe, the web and the use of email helps the Welsh abroad to identify fellow Welsh people and join Welsh organisations. They can stay in touch with Welsh news and events through sites such as icwales and the BBC, and listen to good quality streamed versions of Radio Wales and Radio Cymru.

The one area where media services are not satisfactorily replicated online is in video content. S4C's site has a minimal amount of video content and the BBC's is of such low quality (having been encoded at a ridiculously low bit-rate) as to be virtually unwatchable. But video encoding and storage costs are falling rapidly and Internet access speeds in many countries are increasing exponentially. Peer-to-peer technologies such as BitTorrent can reduce these costs even further. For the benefit of the Welsh in Wales and abroad, the case for providing a quality video offer, whether paid or unpaid, is almost irresistible.

Internet chat forums are another example of Welsh communities being created online. Welsh rugby fans are well represented on the BBC's *Scrum V* forum with over 15,000 messages listed, more than for any other nation. It is impossible to imagine such a volume of informed rugby debate (and banter) in the offline world. The maes-e site plays the same role for the Welsh language community. The site is well structured and the forums contain 150,000 messages posted by over 1,300 registered users, covering all aspects of Welsh life.

Perhaps the greatest potential for the growth of Welsh online communities lies in Web Logs or 'Blogs'. These are personal web sites on which individuals post their thoughts, feelings or views, depending on the nature of the Blog. They reinforce a community effect by enabling feedback and providing links to likeminded blogs and sites. Some political blogs in the US have enormous clout and have become a source of news and comment to rival the traditional news media. Matt Drudge's blog, the Drudge Report, broke the Monica Lewinsky affair and bloggers have more recently been credited with forcing the resignation of CNN's chief news executive and several senior reporters at CBS. Companies too are having to take note: Microsoft employs a blogger to comment on its products as part of the company's PR department.

welsh website selection

- **Welsh language learning:**
  www.dysgu.cd/ (Coleg Digidol)
  www.swan.ac.uk/dace/e-wlpan
  www.bbc.co.uk/wales/learnwelsh
  /www.radioacen.fm
- **Welsh language tools:**
  www.geiriadur.net
  www.yba.llgc.org.uk/ (Biographies)
  www.google.com/intl/cy
  www.cy.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hafan
  www.cynghanedd.com
  www.straeon.com
  www.rhegiadur.com
- **Communities:**
  www.bbc.co.uk/wales/scrumv
  www.maes-e.com
- **Blog examples:**
  www.peterblack.blogspot.com
  www.leightonandrews.blogspot.com
  www.daviddaviesam.blogspot.com
  www.gwleidydd.blogspot.com/
  www.blemaergath.blogspot.com

Welsh blogs are not there yet. Given the limits of the Welsh media, a niche exists for political and satirical blogs on Welsh life and politics, yet the English language blogs are surprisingly silent. Part of the reason for this may be the limited example being set by our political representatives. Only three AMs have their own blogs. Liberal Democrat Peter Black, Labour's Leighton Andrews and Conservative David Davies regularly publish their thoughts and provide links to related sites. More AMs should do so. It is an easy way to communicate with local and national constituencies, to react to news stories and to generate feedback from the electorate. Representatives of the Assembly, an institution which prides itself on having the most open government in the western world, are missing a trick by denying constituents the opportunity to get to know their AMs and develop a dialogue with them through their blogs.

Welsh language blogs provide evidence of the potential of political blogs. Several offer punchy commentary on subjects ranging from the Middle East peace process to the future of ITV Wales. They also benefit from greater cohesion: at least 50 exist and virtually all are linked to each other and to maes-e, thus reinforcing the community effect.

The blogs that exist in English are often personal journals and these, quite naturally, have little to say about the weightier subjects facing Wales. But even they can provide interesting insights into the character of the nation. The blog 'Baddly Dubbed Boy', for example, recounts the difficulties of a Welshman of Asian origin in affirming his Welshness on rugby day, whilst 'A Life In Wales' describes the blogger's enjoyment in simply watching the Welsh rain.

Our dreary weather; an in depth discussion of Ryan Giggs' hairstyle; eleven variations on 'fart' in Welsh; and a Welsh-Fresian dictionary already merit an online presence. It is time our political system also is given greater online expression. Our leaders in Wales must assume this responsibility.

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digital divide

wil thomas says computers should be located somewhere between the blender and the microwave

Developments over the last few years have brought faster internet access within reach of more than 80 per cent of Wales's population. But to what extent are we making best use of the internet? A short time ago even places like Outer Mongolia had better internet infrastructure. Many places we perceive to be backward are already ahead of us in this respect. In a world of rapid globalisation and outsourcing, this is a critical matter. Decisions on business location are largely influenced by infrastructure and skills. The internet is the 21st century equivalent of the canals, railways and motorways of the past.

Yet the skill levels of those who are already on broadband, essentially the IT literate amongst us, are surprisingly modest. I say this on the basis of hearing countless tales of woe from people who have difficulties arising from poor computer maintenance. This may have nothing to do with broadband supply, but nevertheless it is an issue that comes up every day.

If basic computer maintenance is an issue, what does that tell us about the range of applications that people use? Even among those that are sufficiently IT literate to want faster internet, insufficient use is being made of the technology's capability. A few years ago a global study found that we were making under 10 per cent use of the technology's potential. Considering all that broadband can now offer us, this percentage is probably much lower today.

If this is the case with the IT literate, how much more are those losing out who do not have broadband, or are without any form of internet connection? According to data from the NS Omnibus Survey published in June 2004, fewer than 50 per cent of the Welsh population had used the internet in the previous three months – a figure well below the UK average. Furthermore, the 2001 Census found that only 44 per cent possessed a home computer.

The Welsh Assembly Government is putting in place a marketing campaign to address this issue. There is no doubt that 'pull' marketing works and inevitably numbers will increase. Today's reachable prices will also make a huge difference. However, two major questions remain:

1. How do we persuade people to maximise their use of technology, using a greater range of applications and tools?
2. How do we reach those who consider computers to be an alien form?

Overcoming these barriers becomes a very important issue for the economy since the use of computers and the internet at home inevitably spills over to the workplace. If social and environmental considerations are taken into account then addressing these questions becomes even more compelling. These were some responses from a group of people I surveyed recently on why they did not make use of the internet:

- I wouldn't make enough use of the internet to justify the cost.
- Only the son (or daughter) knows how to use it in our household.
- I would not know where to start to use a computer.

People's perceptions of what the internet entails is preventing them from embracing a tool that could have an enormously positive effect on their lives. For too many people, Information

Broadband offers great opportunities but only 44 per cent of us have a computer at home.

Technology is not relevant to their everyday lives. They are on the wrong side of the 'Digital Divide' because they lack Information Technology skills.

I would like to see computers located in peoples' kitchens, somewhere between the blender and the microwave, and used just as often. But we need to go much further, with an E-Communities project aimed at changing Wales's digital landscape. This would involve initiatives such as:

- Community websites replacing newspapers as the source of local news and information.
- Low price distribution of computers and internet connections for socially disadvantaged groups in order to stimulate greater use
- Skills development for people already using IT as well as basic training
- Community broadcasting such as village events, church services, and community council meetings relayed via broadband.

Such a project would stimulate demand, heighten usage, and make IT relevant. To achieve in this arena we need more than the pull marketing that the Welsh Assembly Government is doing. This works for people who are already on the platform waiting for the train. But what if they are not on the platform as is the case so much of the time?

We should replace some of the advertising with education in places where people congregate, such as pubs and clubs and not just in schools and colleges. This should be motivated by people with experience of community capacity building

Nor should we slacken our efforts in making cheap broadband available to all. ADSL is wonderfully widespread, but does not give anything like universal coverage. For many of our rural dwellers – arguably those most in need of broadband in order to reduce isolation from markets and customers – cheap two way broadband will still not be possible by the time ADSL will have completed its roll out across Wales this summer.

The Digital Divide is a reality today. It could become an even bigger reality in the near future. Addressing it must be a central part of overcoming social and economic disadvantage. As ever, the answers are in front of our noses. All we need to do is act on them.

- *Wil Thomas is Managing Director of Deudraeth Cyf, a not-for-profit company based in Penrhyndeudraeth, Gwynedd. This provides a wireless broadband service to local towns where market initiatives would take several years to implement. This article is based on a presentation he gave to the IWA's* Future of Broadband Communications *conference, held at Llancaiaich Fawr Manor, Caerphilly, in November 2004.*

y filter sqwar

aled rowlands reports on an experiment measuring Welsh inter-connectivity

Almost all of us have had the experience of it being 'a small world': meeting an old friend in an unusual place or finding a mutual acquaintance when talking with a stranger. But are these just freak occurrences or should we expect it to happen as we are all part of a shrinking world? Is Wales the apocryphal "land of the twitching curtain" or is that just another myth?

Forty years ago a social psychologist from Harvard University, Professor Stanley Millgram was considering the same problem and devised a neat experiment. He sent 300 letters to people across America with the description of one person, whom he called the 'target person'. Instructions asked the recipient to forward the letter to the target person, but only if they knew him on a first name basis. If, as was more likely, they didn't know him, they should post it to a person who was closer to him, perhaps someone living in the same area, doing the same type of job, or who had gone to the same university. The plan was for the letters to jump closer and closer until they finally reached the target person. Before the experiment began, Millgram guessed it would take about a hundred jumps to get from the original person to the target. However, on average it only took six. From this it was said that America had "six degrees of separation".

My plan was to undertake a BBC Wales radio series to repeat Millgram's experiment. To ensure its scientific veracity, I brought in the University of Glamorgan where researchers are considered the leaders in this field in the UK. The first step was to pick our own target person. We needed someone quite 'normal' who would be well known in their own community but not outside. We identified minister of religion Gareth Rowlands, a self-confessed 'fairly normal north Walian' now living in Caerphilly. We put together a "pack" which included details about Gareth, instructions and ten stamped envelopes. At the beginning of September 2004 our letters went to 100 people throughout Wales, 25 in each quarter of the country. Then all we could do was to wait and hope that some would find their way into our target's letterbox in Caerphilly

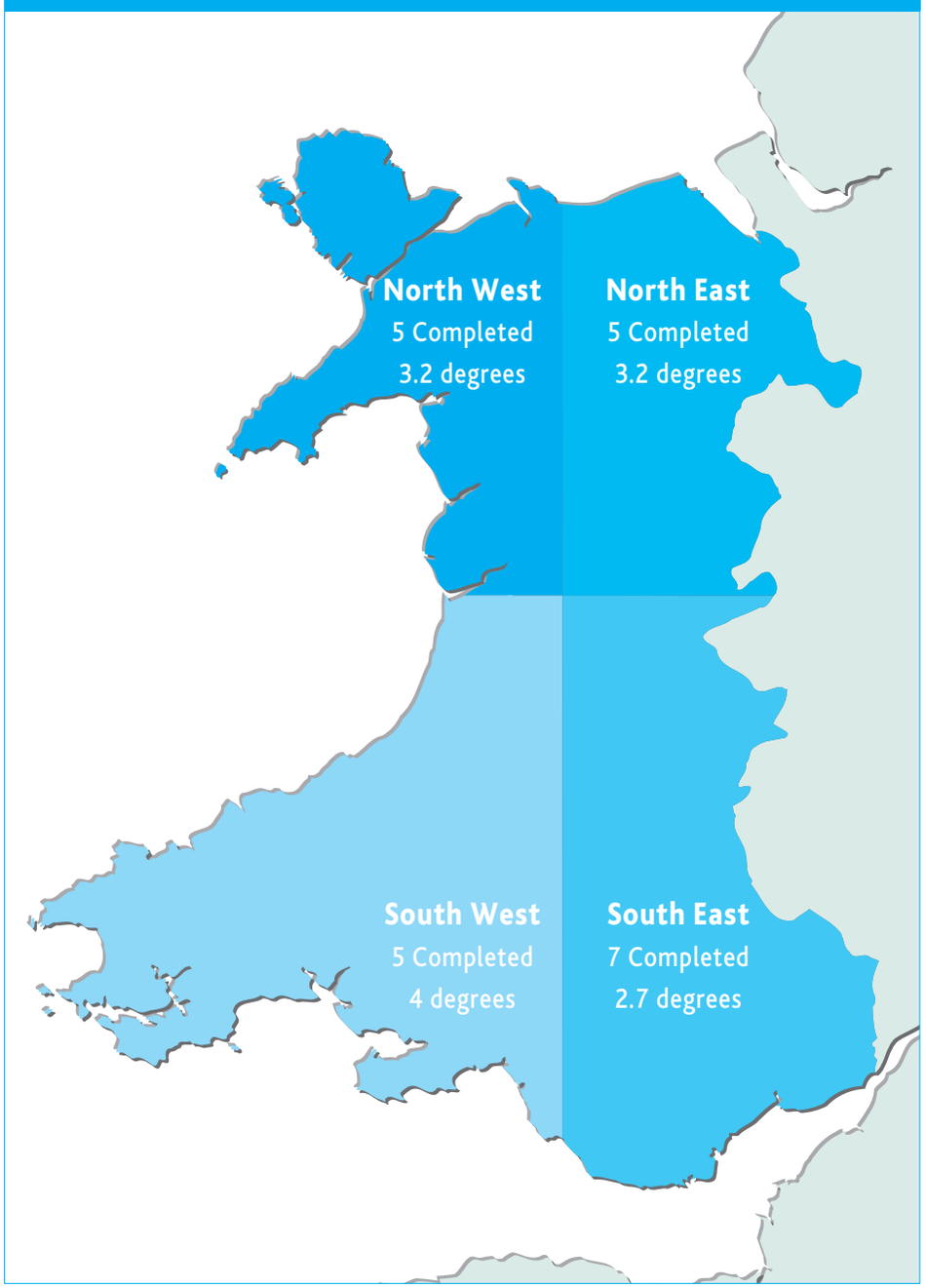
We were hoping for ten letters to get through to the end. In the original experiment 27 per cent of the chains were completed. However, we were concerned that because of the explosion in junk mail many of our letters would end up in the bin. Would the more fractured society produced in Wales over the past 40 years mean that we were more or less connected? Our expert advisors guessed that ten to 15 letters would get through to the end and the degrees of separation would be around five. That is to say, each letter would take five jumps to get to the target.

The results were not as predicted. Firstly, 22 letters arrived at the target. This in itself is a measure that Wales is a very connected country. However, the result that surprised us most was that, of those completed chains, on average

it only took 3.22 jumps. This is much lower than Millgram's original experiment and lower than predicted.

The results threw up some Welsh quirks. The 'north-south divide' is a much used term describing the terrible transport links and differing attitudes of the people of Wales, but it didn't show itself in the experiment. As shown in the graphic below, five letters were completed in the north west, north east and south west, while seven were completed in the south east. This indicates that the north is as well connected as the south west. But the results indicate that we have quicker connections north to south than we do east to west, as the average degrees from the south west was 4, compared to 3.2 from both the north east and north west. So, even though the transport links are bad and the people are proud of their region of Wales, our results indicate that there are very strong personal connections from north to south.

inter-regional connections



Previous experiments have shown that the work connections of the 'target person' has been critical in getting the letters through. Yet it was still somewhat of a surprise that 16 of our letters, on their final jump, passed though the hands of a person who knew our target through his work as a religious minister.

What was even more surprising was that all 22 of the final links in the completed chains were Welsh speakers. Our target, Gareth is a Welsh speaker, but that information wasn't given out in the letter. Somehow, at the final stage all the letters found a Welsh language path and got through.

Our partners at the University of Glamorgan think there are a number of possible reasons why the experiment was successful in achieving so many completed chains and for the degrees of separation to be so few. Although our target person, Gareth Rowlands is a self-confessed 'normal type of guy' the most plausible explanation is that he stands in the middle of two very well connected groups in Wales, the religious and Welsh language communities.

Although Wales has changed over the past 20 years from being one of the most religious to one of the most secular countries in Europe, it seems that most people still know their local vicar or minister, or if not they know someone who does. There is already clear evidence that religion in any country is a 'connector' and that was played out loud and clear in this experiment. One person, Denzil John, received and passed on five letters to the target. As he explained, he has three things in common with the target that made him an obvious choice – "I'm known as 'the Welsh Minister from Caerphilly'".

The project's 'target', Rev. Gareth Rowlands – a self-confessed 'fairly normal north Walian' now living in Caerphilly – clutches some of the letters that competed the chain after a lower than predicted average of 3.22 jumps.

And it's undoubtedly the Welsh language that created the biggest impact. Many people in Wales will have experienced how difficult it is to try and walk 100 metres around the National Eisteddfod maes without meeting someone they know. Anecdotally, while conducting the interviews for the radio series, I found that Welsh speakers have an unconscious game they play whereby they try and draw a connection between themselves and another Welsh speaker through their friends and family. The conversation usually starts with the school or university the two people went to, then if that doesn't work an attempt to track back through family or social activities. This all makes for a well connected society.

In the last edition of Agenda, Rhodri Morgan was setting out his vision for the way the civil service in Wales should work. Being a well connected country and being able to make quick decisions because all the "players" know each other is at the heart of that vision. So not only does this research indicate that we're a nation of gossips but it could also influence a new form of Welsh structure.

• *Aled Rowlands is a producer with BBC Wales's Political Unit.*

anthony beresford examines the arguments surrounding the proposed M4 relief road south of Newport

build it but don't toll it

The Assembly Government's announcement, last December, that Newport is to have its long-awaited M4 relief toll road polarised Welsh opinion into two distinct camps.

The 'commercialists', comprising hauliers, local businesses, professional travellers and others applaud the announcement, seeing the road as absolutely necessary and long overdue. The second camp, the 'environmentalists', believe that the true cost of the road is simply too high for the scheme to be justified. They point to loss of green space and wildlife habitat, increased traffic noise and pollution, and probable encouragement of yet more road-based mobility. Between these camps sits a third group of observers who question the proportionate value of committing £360 million to a road which could well prove to be severely under-utilised for perhaps 20 hours each day.

The first thing to be said in examining these arguments is the existing M4 around Newport is at best a compromise and at worst completely inadequate for modern transport requirements. It was designed largely as a distributor road through the northern suburbs of Newport and only special dispensation, for instance dropping certain design criteria, allowed it to be built as a motorway. As it stands it should be classified as a dual carriageway, for the following reasons:

- Excessive number of five junctions and access points
- Over-tight curve radii
- Steep gradients
- Intermittent hard shoulders
- Two-lane section at its busiest point
- Narrow tunnels
- Major interchanges at Coldra and St. Julian's

The proposal for a relief motorway around Newport is far from new. In early 1989, a South Wales Area Traffic Study concluded that an M4 Relief Road was necessary partly to ease congestion around Newport and partly to gain full value from the Second Severn Crossing which was then under discussion. The Route Selection Study and Public Consultation ran from 1992 to 1994, and a construction start date of 1999-2000 was envisaged.

More than 2,000 route variations were considered and mathematically modelled. As usual with major building projects, a short-list of three possible alignments was drawn-up and evaluated in terms of their economic, environmental and safety implications.

A fourth alternative to widen the existing motorway was considered but rejected on the following grounds:

- Need to demolish around 340 houses mainly in High Cross and St. Julian's areas.
- Construction noise, vibration, dust, traffic, access.
- Poor economic performance compared with southern options for a fresh road.

A fifth option, combining some widening and some new road, was also rejected because of its environmental impact, cost and relatively poor value for money.

The current scheme for the new M4 route is considered to be an improvement on all the earlier alternatives. In particular, its environmental impact will be less because its new alignment is partially on Llanwern Steelworks land rather than the Magor Marsh and Redwick and Llandevenny Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Good for Wales as this new M4 route around Newport undoubtedly will be, a number of issues question the commercial logic underpinning the scheme:

- Is the transport environment around Newport sufficiently similar to that around Birmingham for the M6 Toll to act as a model for the Newport scheme?
- Will enough road-users benefit from the road?
- Should the Newport relief road be tolled and, if so, at what level?

In order to examine these questions, it is useful to first consider the

morphology of the West Midlands motorways which have been under intolerable pressure for at least 30 years. Indeed, the M5/M6 interchange was officially branded the country's worst bottleneck in 2002 for the persistence, regularity and predictability of the traffic hold-ups that every day brought at least ten miles of the network to a standstill. Twenty miles of stationary traffic were not uncommon prior to the opening of the tolled alternative.

Although traffic jams around Newport are bad, and probably the worst in Wales, they are not of the same magnitude, frequency or persistence as those seen around the Birmingham box prior to the M6 Toll. Consequently, the analogy with Birmingham which is often drawn by Welsh planners and commentators should be questioned. It is simply wrong to see the M6 Toll as necessarily the 'model solution' for Newport.

Secondly, by no means all of the trips undertaken in the Newport area will lend themselves to switching to the new motorway. In particular, journeys between south west Wales, Cardiff and the West Midlands, currently undertaken via Monmouth and the M50, will gain no benefit from the Newport relief road. Similarly, for eastbound traffic, all destinations between Castleton and Magor will be better served by the existing M4. Conversely, all westbound movements originating in the Newport area will route perfectly satisfactorily via the A48 or the existing M4.

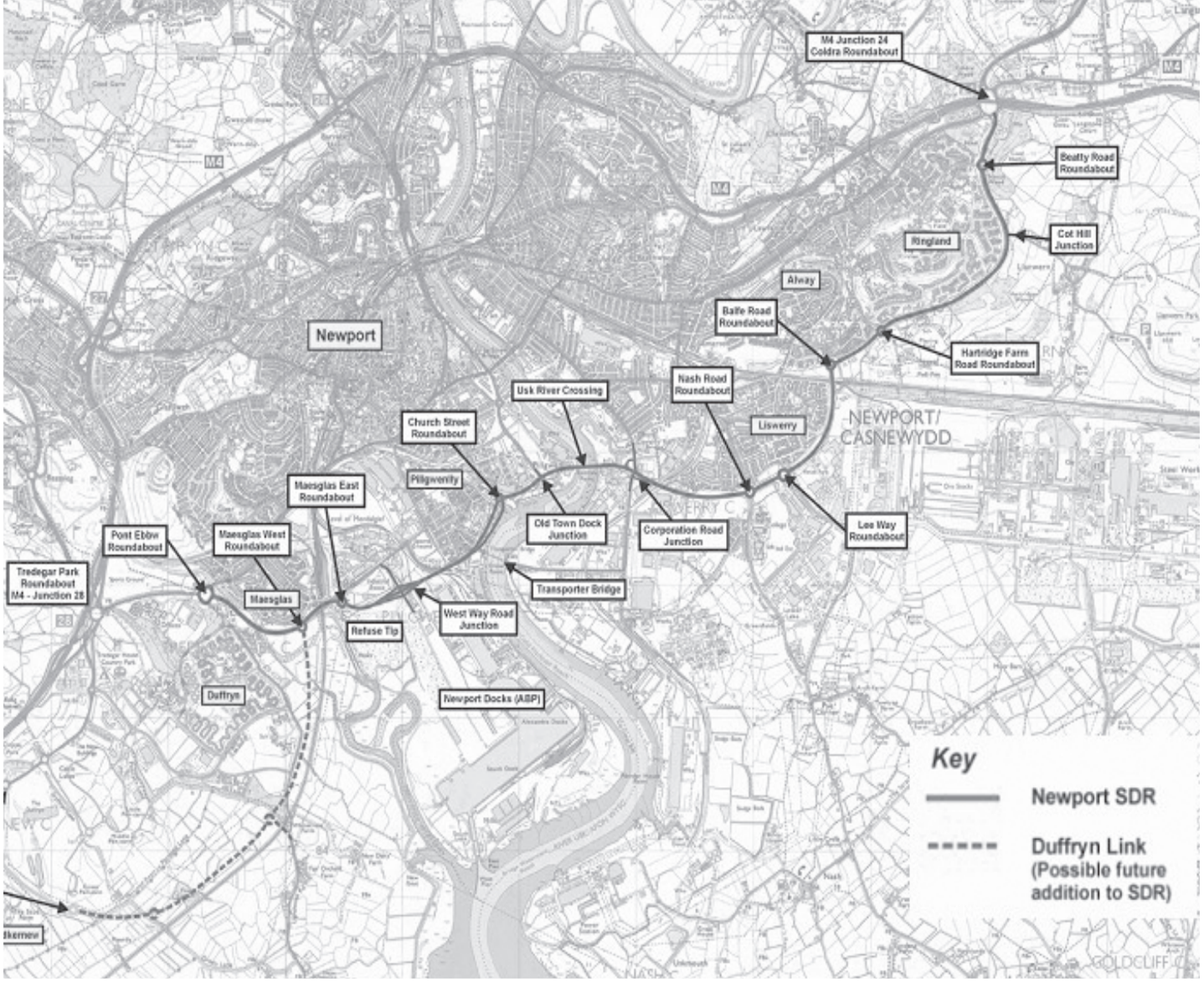
This leaves only journeys from west Wales and Cardiff to Bristol and London, as the potential 'market' for the Newport relief route. Although this may well constitute the major share of the overall flow, for most of the time, perhaps 20 out of 24 hours each day, the existing M4 is perfectly able to cope with traffic volumes. Moreover, the M4 relief road will not be particularly attractive even for these potential users as it will offer time savings over the old route which will be only marginal.

This leads to a third consideration: time-savings over the 15 mile route from Magor to Castleton are derived from speed differentials between the present and proposed roads. If M4 car average speeds are, say, 40 mph and relief route speeds are 60 mph, the time savings would be only three minutes using the new road. If speeds differ by 10 mph, time savings become only 1.5 minutes. So, even if a speed restriction were placed on the existing M4 Newport section, the time benefit of using the new route would only be a few minutes.

Interestingly, the Severn Bridges cost only £2.40 (current one-way car rate) to produce a time-saving of around an hour over the alternative route via Gloucester. Up to £5 of fuel is also saved by using the direct route into and out of Wales, so the Bridge actually offers good value for east-west movements.

In contrast, for 80 per cent of the time, the benefit of using the new M4 relief road over the existing road will be virtually zero

The two lane motorway at the Brynglas Tunnels on the edge of Newport causes a bottle neck that makes the case for the relief road, but only in the rush hours.



Map showing the proposed Newport relief road.

as average speeds will be approximately the same. It should, therefore, be priced at zero. If it is not, then users will have no time saving incentive to use it, but rather only a disincentive in the form of the toll – envisaged to be £2 for cars at current prices.

Furthermore, as has been observed in the West Midlands, even at peak times when congestion is most likely, a relatively small – perhaps 20 per cent – diversion of traffic on to the new route leaves the original road uncongested. Translating this to conditions in south east Wales at peak times, roughly 7-9am and 5-7pm, perhaps 20 per cent of the traffic will re-route via the M4 relief road, expressing willingness to pay £2 for the probable time savings of several minutes upwards. However, the removal of this critical 20 per cent, the 'congestion flow', will leave the existing M4 uncongested. As a result it would then offer a service to users virtually as good as the new route, thus removing the incentive to use it.

In the parlance of economics parlance there will be insufficient product differentiation between the existing M4 and the new route to leave room for a charge on one but not the other. For perhaps 20 hours per day, therefore, the toll will have to be zero: only for around four hours per day could a toll be applied. Otherwise, motorists will simply ignore the tolled route for most of the time.

There is an interesting implication of this thesis. A theoretical opportunity to "segment the market" will arise with the completion of the new motorway. More vehicles could be tempted onto the road (and hence pay for it via the accumulated toll revenues) if a dispensation was made for those 'in a hurry'. That is to say, the only way for users to derive significant benefit from the new road would be to remove the 70mph national speed limit from it so that time-savings between Magor and Castleton could be achieved to the value of roughly the cost of the toll. Of course, such a measure would be inconsistent will all other aspects of traffic management and road safety in the UK. Nonetheless, this line of argument leads to a clear and simple message: build the Newport relief road, but don't toll it.

• *Dr Anthony Beresford works in Logistics and Operations Management at Cardiff Business School.*

creu cyfle – cultural explosion

eluned haf outlines a project promoting links between Wales and the ten EU Accession States

How much do you know about the culture of Slovakia or Hungary? You may have a distant relative who immigrated to Wales from Poland or you may have tasted some of the delicious wines of Slovenia but know little more about old Europe's eastern bloc. The culture of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia are flourishing. Yet how much do we really know about the new members of the European Union?

The accession of ten new member states to the EU last May has opened important doors for Wales and her culture. The enlargement of the EU from 15 to 25 Member states also presents a challenge to the Union to show that political integration does not lead to cultural uniformity. Forced uniformity, after all, is a past experience the majority of the new member states consciously left behind when the iron curtain lifted in 1989.

As a 'world nation' within the UK and a dynamic region within an enlarged EU, Wales now has the opportunity to share with our newest EU neighbours our distinctive experiences – whether they are linguistic, cultural, sporting, economic, political or constitutional. These are experiences that make Wales highly relevant to the new member states. During the UK presidency of the EU all the eyes of Europe will be on the UK. It is an opportunity for Wales to put itself back on the European map.

Europe's new member states have a rich cultural heritage and a colourful tapestry of lesser used languages. Their cultural industries will be of major importance to their economic and social integration within the EU. Cultural industries are also the fastest growing sector in Wales and throughout the UK. They have now overtaken agriculture in terms of employment. By their very nature the cultural industries are all-embracing and reach people who otherwise might not interact with Europe.

Scare stories about illegal immigration, job losses and a loss of identity, generated by the British media and some politicians, have resulted in widespread misunderstanding. There is scepticism and mistrust about EU enlargement in Wales as elsewhere in the UK. What the tabloids fail to mention is that these 'Eastern invaders' are coming to Wales to do many of the jobs that we refuse to do and in turn give a vital boost to many of our key sectors.

Creu Cyfle–Cultural Explosion, a project funded by the EU and led by the IWA, will bridge the cultures of Wales and the new Europe through dance, literature, music, visual art and new media. It will bring together Academi – the Welsh literary promotion agency, Dawns i Bawb, Gwynedd Council, S4C, and the William Mathias Music Centre. It has also secured support from the Arts Council of Wales, Cultural Enterprise, the National Eisteddfod, the Welsh Development Agency, the Wales European Centre, Wales Tourist Board, the British Council, Scotland Europa, Chwarae Teg, Wales Baltic Society, and Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen. The project, which lasts from August 2005 through to February 2006, has five main activities:

1 **Creu Cyflu–Cultural Explosion Song**
Overseen by the William Mathias Music Centre, the specially commissioned Cultural Explosion song will depict themes from the Baltic freedom song celebrating the coming of democracy in 1989. The song will be rehearsed and performed by Gwynedd youth choir, Gwynedd Brass band and a harp group. A series of enlargement workshops will be arranged for children attending Noddfa playgroup who will perform the song together with Doniau Cudd, the local percussion group for people with disabilities.

2 **Poetry and Literature Competition** This will be an all-Wales creative writing competition for young people to be launched at the Eisteddfod by Academi. The competition theme will be EU enlargement and an information kit will be available on the web and sent to schools and students in Wales.

3 **Dance** A specially commissioned Enlargement dance based on influences from the new member states will be produced by a Hungarian choreographer. The Enlargement Dance will be rehearsed and performed by the community Welsh dance group, Dawns i Bawb.

4 **Video Shorts** S4C will co-ordinate the production of five video shorts based on five different EU enlargement themes. The video shorts will be created by five young video producers in the media industry. After the Eisteddfod premiers, the videos will be broadcasted during a Cultural Explosion Project week on S4C.

5 **Mosaic in the Victoria Dock** The enlargement mosaic will be inspired by the results of a popular questionnaire to the people of Gwynedd about their views of the enlarged EU. This will be undertaken through the local media, schools and other community networks. The mosaic will be positioned in Caernarfon's new multi million pound Victoria Dock development. It will be a permanent feature to remind the people of Wales and tourists of the new Europe, celebrating Wales' role in its creative future.

Creu Cyflu–Cultural Explosion will be launched at this year's National Eisteddfod in Caernarfon. Amongst the plethora of activities around the field, the annual IWA – Eisteddfod lecture will this year be delivered by Lord Elis-Thomas, Presiding Officer of the National Assembly, who will highlight the opportunities for a partnership between Wales and the ten new member states.

Catrin Finch will be artistic director of the Creu Cyfle – Culture Explosion Gala Concert at the Galeri theatre and arts centre in Caernarfon in February 2006.

A Gala Celebration, held on 19 February 2006 will be a culmination of all the activities carried out throughout the project. Held in the newly opened Galeri theatre and arts centre in Caernarfon, it will be hosted by internationally renowned harpist Catrin Finch. The following day an international Creu Cyflu–Cultural Explosion Conference will bring together ideas, partnerships and projects related to the enlarged EU's cultural industries. It will be a unique opportunity for cultural operators in Wales to meet their counterparts in the industries of the new member states and to identify policy themes, funding opportunities and links.

The conference will facilitate new cultural partnerships, involving practitioners, artists, academics, politicians and the media from all over Europe. Representatives from the new member states will convey the needs of the cultural industries in their countries as well as learning from the Welsh experience. Workshops will be dedicated to best practice.

The Creu Cyflu–Cultural Explosion Directory listing cultural practitioners and potential partners in Wales and in the new member states will be produced and distributed. A chapter will be dedicated to each of the countries and one section will identify sources of funding and best practices. The directory will be given to each delegate to the conference.

The objective of Creu Cyflu–Cultural Explosion is to create sustainable linkages of mutual benefit which will continue for many years to come. It is intended to generate a series of aftershocks, breaking into new sectors, crossing new boundaries and bringing the rest of Europe closer to Wales.

- *Eluned Haf is Managing Director of Una: www.una-europa.com / 07834 458 501. For more information about the Creu Cyflu–Cultural Explosion project, contact Creu Cyflu–Cultural Explosion@una-europa.com*

promoting cohesion

glenys kinnock argues the EU is about pooling sovereignty for mutual benefit

The most categoric and practical argument for Wales to support the firmest attainable engagement with the European Union is that 155,000 Welsh jobs and 60 per cent of Welsh trade are dependent upon it.

These bread and butter realities are reinforced by the social dimension of the EU. The Social Chapter and other relevant legislation have brought hugely improved workplace standards and rights, including maternity leave, pro rata protection for part-time workers, working time regulation, holiday rights, the European Works Council and much more.

The new Constitutional Treaty represents a victory for those of us who want the European Union to be an enduring legal association of democracies that retain sovereignty. It is a fundamental rebuttal of the hard-line federalists who argue for that European nation which keeps John Redwood awake at nights, but for which there is as little real appetite amongst many of our neighbours as there is in our country.

The simple reality is that the Union will function more effectively with 25 member states with a body of modern rules than it can with the Treaty established in the 1950s for six member states and periodically modified since. Under the new Treaty, most of the power stays with member states. On the basic issues of sovereignty – tax, foreign and defence policy and changes in the Treaty – the conclusive authority of the national veto remains with the UK and every other member state. There can be no overruling on those basics and everything that depends upon them. That is why, rationally, there should be no problem with a constitutional Treaty which is no more than a book of operational rules that does not imply that the EU will become any kind of super state.

For euro neurotics the constitutional Treaty is the culmination of decades of continental trickery by devious foreigners producing a political union which is monstrously different from the economic agreement that Ted Heath signed in 1973 and the Referendum endorsed in 1975.

This is complete rubbish and it deserves to be treated as such. The idea of a European Union has always been manifestly political as well as economic. As one Prime Minister put it: "The paramount case for being 'in' is the political case for peace and security." Its not often that I quote Margaret Thatcher with approval, but even a broken clock is right twice in every 24 hours, and the lady who subsequently turned on this issue was certainly right on that occasion. The EU is not a one-way larceny of sovereignty, it is a pooling of sovereignty for collective security and collective gain by each Member State.

The euro sceptics argue that Norway is a more independent, more sovereign nation than the UK, because it is not a member of the EU. And yet Norway is compelled, by its voluntary membership of the European Economic Area, to implement EU directives in order to maintain the advantages of its trading relationship with EU Member States. The Norwegians refer to this as their "fax democracy" because that is how they receive the body of laws which they can play no part in making or changing.

Recognising the opportunities and benefits of EU membership, together with recognition of the disadvantages of detachment can, and I believe will,

produce a Yes majority in the coming referendum.

The next 12 months will be crucial in deciding the future of EU regional policy. By the end of 2005 there will be an agreement between EU Governments on the financial perspectives and structural funds regulations to 2013 and, consequently, we will know what kind of funding support Wales will receive after 2006.

Six Member States – including the UK – which are net contributors to the EU budget, argue that the budget settlement for 2007-13 proposed by the Commission is too ambitious and that Cohesion Funding is one element that needs to be cut. In the European Council meetings this year the resulting debate will be of crucial significance to Wales since we are a part of the EU which continues to have justified need for Structural Fund support.

Inside the original EU15, west Wales and the Valleys would still be below the 75 per cent GDP figure that is used to determine which regions require most financial support. Inside the EU25 we could fall outside because the averages per capita income will drop as a result of the admission to the Union of ten new relatively low income states. Left to itself, that 'statistical effect' could have grave implications for Wales.

Certainly, it would be mitigated if as the result of change the government fulfilled its guarantees that Wales would not be cut off from all support. The promise is that a re-nationalised regional policy would be flexible and sustainable, and would meet the need of our communities. That is a strong commitment and it is welcome.

However, it should not obscure the fact that European funding of development has been materially better than any preceding commitment from successive UK governments in amounts, in focussed quality, and because of a seven year spending schedule.

European funding has helped create 47,000 new jobs in Wales and safeguard 40,000 more. Nearly a quarter of a million Welsh people have attended, or are currently attending training courses, partly or wholly supported by EU resources. Some 39,000 people have attained a qualification – for some their only formal qualification – because courses have received sustained EU support.

In the years in which Wales has had Objective 1 status, there has so far been direct investment of over £900 million in the communities where it is needed most. What even these impressive figures do not tell, is the human story behind each job found, each qualification achieved. Too often those sniping from the sidelines choose to ignore those realities.

Over the last four years I have seen countless people who I know would have joined the ranks of the economically inactive, the depressed, the long-term claimants – but for projects supported by the EU.

These are the reasons that an extension of European funding is something worth fighting for. There is an understandable concern that many projects have a limited life span, and, in an ideal world there would of course be longer duration of funding. But, even with time limited spending the investment given to communities is a basis for sustainable, individual and cumulative economic advance.

A project may have to close in 2006, but that will not take away a young mother's computer qualification. It will not take away the confidence given to a former steel worker after starting his own new business. It will not reverse the collective pride and confidence generated in our communities that are making the transition to modern opportunities and occupations. Those are the realities which must prompt support for the Budget framework presented by the last European Commission and sustained by the new European Commission.

The Socialist Group and the European Parliament more generally have a proud and consistent record of supporting the Commission's Cohesion Policy, and we will be doing so again in 2005. The negotiations will continue, and whilst the UK does have support from five other member states in its proposal for cutting the budget, only the Dutch apparently support the UK position. The rest are split by what they want to hold onto and what they want to ditch. The natural assumption is that we will end up with a compromise position, which, whilst not ideal, would still see funding come to Wales from a central European 'pot'.

Meanwhile, there is a broad agreement between the European Commission, the UK Government, local government and the Welsh Assembly that the levels of state aid need to be brought down in order to better develop competition in the EU, whilst still allowing sufficient scope for assisting poorer areas.

There are still a number of issues to be resolved here. The Welsh Development Agency thinks that identifying Assisted Areas at the NUTS2 level would seem to be the most logical method, as suggested by the European Commission. Obviously that has support from some local authorities in Wales. However, the UK government believes that by using the NUTS3 level we could better take into account pockets of deprivation. In Wales this would mean that Swansea and Bridgend would be unlikely to be assisted areas beyond 2006.

Our economy will obviously continue to be faced by many challenges over the coming years, but we have already come a long way. The drive towards full employment is nothing short of a revolution in Wales with 120,000 more people in work in our country than in 1997. Our main focus must now be on bringing better jobs, and on engaging or re-engaging the 150,000 economically inactive people in Wales who want a job.

In a century in which there are no longer jobs for life, we must create in Wales a situation where there is employability for life. A growing Europe provides us with more opportunities. Already over 600 Welsh companies export to the EU each month, and trade with the EU brings in £4.5 billion a year. There is scope to build on that.

- *Glenys Kinnock is Labour MEP for Wales. This is an edited excerpt from a lecture she gave to the Regeneration Institute at Cardiff University in February 2005.*

profit and loss in rural wales

harold carter argues that the economic imperatives that drive commercial decisions should not be applied to sparsely populated areas

The provision of services in sparsely populated areas is a fundamental problem facing rural Wales. A history of objection and protest accompanies the closure of cottage hospitals, the lack of specialisms in regional hospitals, the closure of primary schools, village police stations, and post offices, and the reorganisation of magistrates courts and job centres.

However, there has been very little attempt either by the authorities concerned or by objectors to develop a more general understanding of these issues. Should they be seen in isolation or are they all simply aspects of the same condition?

Critical to the situation is central place theory which was initiated by Walther Christaller in Germany in the 1930s and which was extensively elaborated during the latter half of the last century. At its simplest level the theory attempts to define and measure centrality, or the degree to which a town serves its surrounding area, or hinterland, in terms of the goods and services offered.

Two fundamental controls are responsible for the creation of the hierarchy of settlements that occurs. The first is the threshold population or the minimum population required to sustain a service. This can be illustrated by the varying population required to maintain successively a district nurse, a primary health care centre, a general hospital and a specialised eye hospital or one carrying out transplant operations or a specialised children's hospital.

To evaluate these minima is, however, a much more difficult task. As an illustration, it has often been proposed that to sustain a general hospital a population of 250,000 is needed. Yet the fraught nature of such estimates can be seen in the field of primary education. It can be argued that in order to have a sufficient expertise amongst a range of teachers and to supply the ever more elaborate equipment which a primary school needs, then a threshold of at least 100 children is essential. Against this it can be maintained that with smaller numbers a more intimate relation between teacher and pupil can be developed and a more effective link to community established. Thresholds are, therefore, difficult to establish. In commercial terms, however, there is one overriding measure and that is profit: the presence of sufficient demand, another expression of a threshold population, for the operation to return a profit to its owners.

The second control in central place theory is termed the range of a good. This is the maximum distance over which people will travel to purchase a good or derive a service offered at a central place. Here it is not the population of the settlement which constitutes the threshold but that of the settlement plus hinterland. At some range from the centre inconvenience of travel measured in time, cost and trouble will outweigh the value or need of the good, or another nearer centre becomes available. Some might be willing to make the effort but the numbers will be insufficient to create the necessary threshold and the good or service will not be offered: it has been outranged. This is how the hinterland of a town is determined.

It is now apparent that the presence of a commercial operation will depend on the interaction of these two controls. That is certainly a simplification and much more sophisticated procedures were elaborated by retail chains to identify store sites. Thus, for a retail store it is not the direct population numbers which matter but spending power, that is population multiplied by the average wage. In 1998 Penny and Broom outlined 'The Tesco approach to store location' (in N. Wrigley, Ed., *Store Choice, Store Location and Market Analysis,* Routledge) which at the root depends on the twin notions of threshold and range. A simple illustration can be derived from the location of Marks and Spencer stores in Wales. There is only one which can be considered to be within rural Wales and that is at Carmarthen which can draw on population from as far a field as Aberystwyth and Pembroke. Elsewhere, presumably, the necessary threshold cannot be assembled within a tolerable range because of the thinly distributed population.

This situation and the hierarchy of settlements which results, conventionally or intuitively identified as metropolis, city, town, village, hamlet, has long been accepted. However, considerable problems arise when all these controls are transferred to the social services provided by the state. The crucial issue can be made in simple terms. The National Health Service is claimed to provide a service free at the point of delivery. It is difficult to ascertain what precisely is meant by 'at the point of delivery'. But palpably it can be interpreted in a rural context. If that is so then the complete provision is no longer free, but more importantly, nor is it equal. If a person lives a hundred miles away from a hospital, from the point of delivery, then willy-nilly a cost is involved in gaining access to the service point. If transport is provided that cost might not be measured in financial terms, but it certainly operates in time and convenience. In the extreme, if somewhat melodramatic, case the lack of immediate access could result in the loss of life and a measure of disadvantage very far in excess of the merely financial.

Here then is the crux of a universal problem which faces all societies where some socialist principles are presumed to operate. To what degree should the demands of threshold be modified by the exigencies of a tyrannical distance? In more direct terms, to what extent in its operation of social services has the Welsh Assembly Government allowed the inescapable problem of range to modify the demands of working to a minimum threshold? The answer to this would appear to be very little indeed.

It is informative to review the general attitude by the consideration of a general letter which was sent in January 2005 to those who joined a protest at the closure of Jobcentre Plus and Social Security offices in Aberystwyth and Newtown. The letter, from the District Manager of the West Wales Jobcentre Plus, reads:

> "Jobcentre Plus is modernising the way in which it delivers its services. Through a significant investment in the modernisation of our office network and better use of IT, we are dramatically changing the way we help people of working age, giving a real work

> focus for customers claiming benefit. In light of this environment, it is vitally important that the Department and our processes are as efficient as possible. The decision Jobcentre Plus has taken to centralise its benefit processes at a smaller number of Benefit Processing Centres will help to improve our service to customers and contribute to the 30,000 headcount reduction that the Department needs to make between now and 2008. This move will also allow our staff to develop their benefit knowledge and experience and focus on the more complex cases. It will also reduce costs, for example in management and other overheads and make better use of our estates and offices. Half of the processing teams operate with fewer than 10 staff. This is not the most efficient use of taxpayer's money and it is not the most efficient way to process benefits to the timescales we set. …In selecting the number of sites and their locations the following factors have been taken into account. Size- Benefit Processing Centres should ideally accommodate between 250 and 600 processors, with a minimum of 100 staff ... And in Wales, benefit processing will be undertaken at our offices in Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Llanelli, Newport and Wrexham."

A critical examination of this statement will reveal that in spite of the disclaimers over operating a more efficient service, the real driving force is not to minimise range or to help a scattered rural population, but to optimise a threshold deemed proper, indeed one explicitly set out. It is an unequivocal statement of the economies of scale as it operates in the business world. It is also interesting to note the locations prescribed for benefit processing. They are predominantly in south Wales but with the usual gesture to the north. However, the whole of rural Wales is ignored. Here surely was an opportunity to inject some economic boost to the heart of rural Wales.

If the hospital services in Dyfed are examined similar tendencies can be identified. There is a constant implicit stress that it would be to the good for all higher level procedures to be centralised at Glangwili in Carmarthen, with the consequent downgrading of services at Bronglais Hospital at Aberystwyth: a sort of 'Marks and Spencer' response. Bronglais is under constant pressure. It was only with difficulty and after a long struggle that kidney dialysis facilities were set up at Bronglais, saving patients a hundred mile round journey to Carmarthen. A similar struggle is under way to develop full cardiology services.

The administrator, sitting in his urban office and under pressure from government both central and devolved, lays stress on financial savings, on economies of scale, and therefore on threshold populations. The people who wish to access services, and residing in remoter rural locations, lay stress on range and on the most immediate possible access. There results a constant tension between the two which inevitably erupts from time to time as administrators seek savings and the administered seek convenience.

It is true that to offset a barrage of criticism of the concentration of economic development in the south-east that there are promises of the devolution of government departments, especially the moving of major sections of the Assembly's farming and rural affairs operation to Aberystwyth, where the former Welsh Office agriculture department was based until 1995. However, this is a restoration rather than an innovation, and no other centre in rural Wales is to benefit.

It would be manifestly unfair to argue unreservedly for the rights of those in thinly peopled rural areas for complete equality of access, since the impact of costs has to be recognised. But it is perhaps ironic that a committed socialist Assembly Government, which proposes clear red lines as bounding its policies, consistently adopts the capitalist basis of cost, or profit to use the commercial term, in the provision of services and consistently renounces the socialist principle of equal access.

• *Harold Carter is Emeritus Professor of Geography at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.*

A harbinger of things to come? Hermon Primary School in Pembrokeshire failed in its bid to resist closure.

james foreman-peck finds that Welsh secondary schools should not grow any bigger

size matters

In their 2002 report *Trading Places Update: A Review of Progress on Supply and Allocation of School Places* the Audit Commission argued that large schools are more efficient because they have lower costs per pupil. This follows because they can spread the fixed costs of specialised teachers and buildings over a greater number of students. However, it should not be forgotten that schools have more objectives than simply minimising costs per pupil.

What should schools do? Until we agree on the answer school efficiency or performance remains a problematic idea. Even if broad agreement is achieved, parents, teachers and education authorities must decide on the relative importance of the various aspects of the education their schools are supplying. They might all exercise different judgements. Alternatively market weights could be used derived from parental 'willingness to pay'. The valuations of school outputs might be obtained from variation in catchment area house prices, on the grounds that these reflect the access to a school which is not itself priced. Another more difficult measure to approximate is the addition to pupils' lifetime earnings consequent upon the schooling.

Whatever measure is used it must be admitted that education authority cost per pupil cannot be the sole index of efficiency or school performance. A school delivering a better education may be more expensive than another, but it is not necessarily less efficient. It may be worthwhile incurring higher costs for a 'better' school. Conversely it is not necessarily fair simply if all state schools incur the same costs per pupil. A pupil may receive different standards of education depending on the state school attended.

A commonly used partial indicator of school output is exam performance. Among exam performance measures for secondary schools the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A*-C GCSEs has been widely discussed. Large schools might achieve better exam results as well as lower costs per pupil. In this case, accepting the premise that only exam results matter for the sake of argument, there is no problem with moving to larger schools: we gain lower costs and better education. A scatter diagram for Welsh schools in 2002 appears consistent with this contention (Figure 1). Larger schools show some tendency to have better GCSE results.

But schools work with different types of pupils and this influences what they can achieve. One way of attempting to address the problem is to control for the student's exam performance at an earlier stage in their career. School 'value added' performance can be obtained by including exam scores at age 14 (Key Stage 3). There will probably be a secondary school effect that influences the score as an output of three years of education in the school, but this should not bias the judgment about the performance over the following two years. A scatter diagram of the 'value added' measure

figure 1: scatter diagram of school exam performance against school size 2002

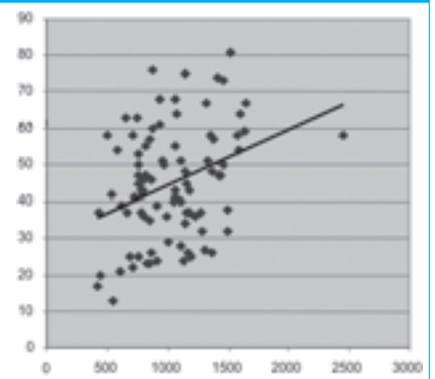
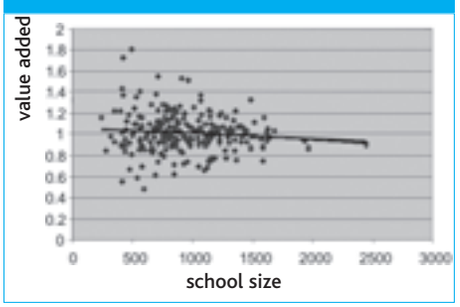


figure 2: scatter diagram of school value-added against school size



against school size shows no tendancy for performance to improve with size (Figure 2). Rather, value added falls slightly.

Apart from resource usage and availability why might school size affect exam performance? Because the wider school environment influences what goes on in the classroom. Endemic bullying, hooliganism and theft in a school make learning and teaching more difficult. How effective a teacher can be depends not only on their personal qualities and those of the students, but also on the attitudes and concerns of pupils. In turn these will be influenced by their peers outside the classroom. A school that is not adequately controlled, like a state without law and order, will find performing well more difficult.

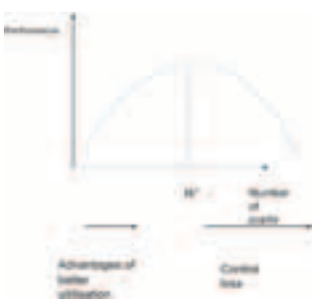
Of course, what comprises school control will always contain elements of controversy and depend upon individual management styles and cultures. But for our present concern we do not need to define control, merely assert that beyond a certain size of school, control becomes more difficult and that this control loss can be measured by school performance. The economic significance of control is that typically as size increases, it tends to offset the advantages of teacher specialisation and curriculum variety.

If we want to understand the relationship between size and performance such as illustrated in Figure 3, we need to control for other influences on performance, the effects of which might otherwise be incorrectly attributed to size. School characteristics include 'type'(see Box 1), class size and whether teaching is available for the 16-18 year old group, that is to say whether there is there is a sixth form. In principle, large schools could have small classes, or small schools might have large classes.

It is sometimes maintained that a large sixth form is necessary to attract and retain high-quality teachers for the whole range of teaching – a sixth form is complementary to good performance in the lower age ranges. An association between good performance in the exams at 16 and numbers staying on to study over the age of 16 could alternatively stem simply from the inspirational impact of good teaching encouraging staying on. Continuing schooling beyond the compulsory age is often used as a measure of school output. On the other hand a school with a sixth form would as a consequence be larger, with corresponding control problems. Possibly resources may even be diverted towards the over 16 group to the detriment of younger pupils. An indication of such concern may be the Welsh Assembly Government proposed closing down of sixth forms of poorly performing secondary schools. Yet if 16-18 year old education were complementary to that of 11-16 year olds, such a policy could exacerbate the plight of poorly performing schools.

A statistical exercise that attempts to control for a large number of Welsh school level factors between 1996 and 2002, including whether or not schools have sixth forms, will be published next year by the author in the US journal *Economics of Education Review.* The estimates for the size performance relationship found are shown in Table 1. The optimum size school is 560 pupils with the 16-18 year old group and 480 without them. In the short run the optimum sizes are higher respectively 660 and 630. The reason is that the average school in the sample is too large and has been designed to operate at or near their present size, and the short run contributors to their performance, such as site and buildings, were not measured in the present exercise.

figure 3: school size and school performance



school categories in Wales

Welsh school categories are Voluntary Controlled (0.8% of the sample), Voluntary Aided (6.2%) Foundation (3.7%), and Community (the base case). In these last the Education Authority employs school staff, owns the school lands and buildings and decides the arrangements for admitting pupils. In Foundation schools the governing body employs the school staff and has primary responsibility for admissions. The school land and buildings are owned by the governing body or a charitable foundation as is normally also the case for the following two categories. Voluntary Controlled schools are almost always church (Roman Catholic or Anglican) schools. The Education Authority employs the school staff and is responsible for admissions. Many Voluntary Aided schools are church schools. The governing body employs the staff and decides admission arrangements.

table one: optimum school size (number of students) for exam results at 16*

	With 16-18 year olds	Without 16-18 year olds
Long run when all inputs are variable	560	480
Short run – with existing buildings etc.	660	630

table two: explaining change in percentage of pupils gaining at least 5 A*-C GCSE by school 1996-2002 in Wales*

Variable	Change in explanatory variable (%point unless indicated)	Induced change in school results
Key Stage 3 achievement two years earlier	10.7	7.3
Efficiency gain (Time index)	6 points	1.6
Deprivation (Free School Meals eligibility)	-3.5	1.1
Non-attendance	-1	0.8
Sixth form	3.6	-0.1
Special Educational Needs student proportion	0.2	-0.1
School size	7.2	-0.2
Class size (students per class)	1.0 student	-0.3
Total estimated induced changes		10.1
Actual change		10.0

These estimates control for the variables listed in Table 2 and others such as school type. Yet other variables added no explanation and so were excluded. The pupil-teacher ratio for instance is unnecessary when class size is included in the estimating equation. Table 2 uses the estimated equation to explain the historical changes between 1996 and 2002.

Since Key Stage 3 scores rose so much over the period (10.7 percentage points), they were an important reason for better school GCSE results (10 percentage points) as shown in Table 2. Less than one third of the improvement in exam results at 16 in one sense is left unexplained when exam scores at 14 are taken into account – though there were, of course, changes tending to cause deterioration in results at 16 as well.

Table 2 shows that half of the 'value added' increase between 1996 and 2002 can be attributed to 'time'. This time effect can be interpreted as increasing 'teaching to the exam' or targeting, as well as simply improvement in teaching. The next largest historical impact on 'value added' comes from a variable beyond the control of the education system, deprivation. Reduced proportions eligible for free school meals improved results by 1.1 percentage points or rather more than one third of the 'value added' change over the period.

The one per cent improvement in attendance between 1996 and 2002 more than offsets the adverse impact of rising class size on the chosen exam performance measure. Increasing school size has the opposite effect. But Table 2 shows that the total effect of increased school size in these years was small, a mere 0.2 of a percentage point reduction in the exam score.

On the other hand radical changes in policy towards school size could have a substantial impact. If school average size was reduced to 600 the exam score would rise by 3.5. Moreover the gains would be much larger for bigger schools. A school of 1,200 cut down to 600 would increase its score by 7.4. If non-attendance could be lowered from 10 to 5, this would push up scores by 4.2. Reducing class size by 5, yields a score increase of only 1.3.

These points matter. For example, in 2001 Swansea closed four schools, of which one was too small according to the present analysis, and replaced them with two schools, one of which is too large. The net effect of the reorganisation on exam performance, considered purely from the viewpoint of school size, will have been slightly adverse.

Education is more than passing exams, however important they are. The central point is simply that we cannot judge whether public expenditure on education is efficient independently of what we want from education. The lowest cost solution could also yield the lowest quality.

The exercise outlined here demonstrates that, with the simplest of output measures, the relationship between school size and performance is not what it might seem. Since only two years of what is usually a five year course is captured by the exam measure employed, it is reasonable to suppose that stronger results will emerge when the whole period of education is covered.

Contrary to the official view for England of the public expenditure watchdog, the Audit Commission, there is no reason to suppose that, even on the present crude definition, educationally efficient schools should be larger than the present average size for Wales. Rather, the opposite is the case. Reducing very large schools to, at the most 600 pupils including the 16-18 year old group, and at the most 500 for schools restricted to education between the ages of 11 and 16, in the long run could yield significant gains in exam performance at 16, both directly and through improved attendance. Even in the short run the optimum size is under 700 students, including sixth formers (compared with an average for 2002 of 936).

Those not achieving any qualifications at age 16 also benefit from smaller schools. Smaller class sizes contribute to better results independently as well. But what goes on in school outside the classroom influences matters as much as class size, where current variations in exam performance are concerned.

• *Professor James Foreman-Peck is Director of the Welsh Institute for Research in Economics and Development, Cardiff Business School.*

health performance

marcus longley and tony beddow

examine what health professionals really think about the Welsh NHS

There is never any shortage of debate or controversy about the National Health Service in Wales. In addition to reports generated from within the service, there have also been several comprehensive reports from distinguished outsiders, such as the Audit Commission, the Auditor General for Wales, and former-banker and adviser to Gordon Brown, Derek Wanless (see Panel 1). With remarkable consistency, they have pointed to the many deep-seated problems and advised on solutions.

But the quality of public debate is rather limited, focusing alternately on waiting times, and the latest service blunder. While both these phenomena are important, they are more a symptom of underlying malaise than its cause.

What many people would like to know is what those in the NHS in Wales (and its partner organisations) really think? If you could have a chat with them over a drink in your local, what would they tell you? What do they believe is happening to the service for which they are responsible? Most importantly, do they think that health services (and their partners in local government and the voluntary sector) are making progress on the reform agenda? Will everything be starting to come right by the time of the next Assembly election in May 2007?

These are questions to which citizens in Wales might like to know the answer. Presumably, Dr Brian Gibbons, the new Minister for Health and Social Care, and AMs more generally, would also like to know what their key managers think of current policies.

In the last two months of 2004 the authors conducted a confidential postal survey of 250 of the leaders of health and social care and the voluntary sector in Wales. It was distributed to the Chairs, Chief Executives, Medical and Nursing Directors of all NHS Trusts and Local Health Boards, the Directors and Cabinet Members for Social Services, and the Chief Officers of Community Health Councils and County Voluntary Councils. Ten health professional organisations were also included – the Medical Royal Colleges in Wales, the Royal College of Nursing, and others. There was a good response rate – 137 overall, 53 per cent, including 108 out of 174 (62 per cent) from the health service respondents.

In some respects the results were reassuring. For example, there was a reasonable measure of consensus on the relative priorities of various national policies. In general, respondents thought the Assembly Government was giving the right priority to issues such as waiting times, improving people's health, strengthening GP-led services, and giving patients and the public more influence over services.

Partnership working has been a strong theme over recent years, in particular the need for the NHS to work much more closely with social services and the voluntary sector. Most respondents thought that reasonable progress was being achieved in this area. People also reported that they enjoyed working in Wales. When given a choice over whether they would prefer to work in England, Scotland or Wales, 64 per cent chose Wales.

Looking to the future, most respondents were fairly confident that the re-shaping of services called for by Wanless and the Audit Commission – changing the roles of many hospitals, providing more care outside hospital – would be well on the way to being achieved by the next Assembly election in 2007.

At the same time, however, there were more areas where people felt that policy was not heading in the right direction. NHS Wales has been re-organised many times in the past 20 years, the most recent only coming into force in 2003. Each time the organisations are changed, many months of effort goes into making the new model work. Unfortunately, it would appear that we still have not got it right.

The key body responsible for driving forward the changes which everyone acknowledges are necessary at the local level is the Local Health Board (LHB). There are 22 in Wales, coterminous with the local authorities with whom they are charged to

key reports on NHS Wales

- ***Access and Excellence: Acute Health Services in Wales*** NHS Cymru Wales, 2000
- ***The Review of Health and Social Care in Wales: The Report of the Project Team*** advised by Derek Wanless, Welsh Assembly Government, 2003
- ***Transforming health and social care in Wales: Aligning the levers of change*** Audit Commission in Wales, 2004
- ***NHS Waiting Times in Wales*** Auditor General for Wales, 2005

table 1: local health boards

	Total	LHB	Trust	CHC	Prof Orgs.	Social Servs
What do you think of the following? Median scores: 1=strongly agree, 2=tend to agree, 3=tend to disagree, 4=strongly disagree						
a Many Local Health Boards have too small a population base to be effective	2	2	1	2	1	2
b Local Health Boards will never bring about major improvements in health services with their current strengths and expertise	2	3	2	3	1	3
c Local Health Boards are well-placed to improve the health status of their local population	2	2	3	2	3	2

table 2: performance management

	Total	LHB	Trust	CHC	Prof Orgs.	Social Servs
What do you think of the following? Median scores: 1=strongly agree, 2=tend to agree, 3=tend to disagree, 4=strongly disagree						
a Welsh Assembly Government is good at performance management	3	3	3	3	3	3
b There are unacceptably large differences in regional performance within NHS Wales	2	2	1	2	1	2

table 3: national policies

	Total	LHB	Trust	CHC	Prof Orgs.	Social Servs
What do you think of the following? Median scores: 1=strongly agree, 2=tend to agree, 3=tend to disagree, 4=strongly disagree						
a There are too many policy initiatives relating to NHS Wales	2	1	2	2	1/2*	1
b Welsh Assembly Government health policies are inconsistent	2	2	2	2	3	2

*** The median value fell between these two scores**

work in close partnership. While most respondents thought that the LHBs were well placed to improve the health of their local populations, they also had little confidence that they were going to change the way services were provided. The LHBs were felt to be too small, and lacking in resources and expertise (see Table 1).

One important role for the Welsh Assembly Government is to manage the performance of NHS Wales, to ensure that resources are available where they are needed, and that they are being used effectively. Few believed that it was discharging this task adequately (Table 2). Some parts of Wales, for example the south east, seemed to be performing markedly less well than others, for example, the north. This finding was echoed in the recent report on Waiting times from the Auditor General for Wales.

For some time there has been concern that national policy is being formulated with insufficient regard to the capacity of the NHS to implement it. This was echoed by the respondents to this survey, who also felt that policies were not even always consistent (Table 3).

One of the biggest differences between health policy in England and Wales has been the rapid expansion of private sector involvement in England. Many foreign commercial organisations have been contracted by the English NHS to provide diagnosis and treatment for patients where waiting lists are longest, with quite spectacular results. Wales has consistently eschewed such an approach. When asked the question 'should the private sector provide an increasing share of diagnostic services and elective operations for the people of Wales?', 53 per cent responded yes, 36 per cent no, with 8 per cent don't knows.

While it is worrying that these opinions are commonly held, many of the problems are not new. Derek Wanless and others have highlighted them often in the past. What is new in this survey is the view of the future held by the leaders of the services. They were asked to assess the likelihood of current policies being well on the way to being achieved by 2007 (see Table 4). In each case, with the exception of progress on re-shaping services (a) and the voluntary sector (i), a majority of respondents thought that it was unlikely that they would be well on the way to being achieved by 2007. Even on the crucial item (a), a majority of Trust, CHC and professional organisation responders thought that such progress was unlikely.

When faced with a difficult decision, patients often ask: 'What would you do, doctor?' So we posed two similar questions to our respondents:

- Which health care system would you want to rely for the care of a loved one?
- In which health care system would you want to work?

Only a third (31 per cent) would choose to rely on Wales for the care of a loved one (Figure 1), but two thirds (64 per cent) would prefer to work in Wales (Figure 2).

There has been much speculation in the press about what these results might mean. We suspect that the choice of system for the care of a loved one probably reflects the time it takes to get into Welsh hospitals, the length of waiting times here compared with England. No-one is suggesting that the quality of care in Wales is any different from the rest of the UK. However, given a choice, would you rather wait more than 12 months to see a consultant, or less than 4 months? If the latter, then Wales is not an attractive option.

As to where people would prefer to work, the popularity of Wales might partly be explained by familiarity. Most would rather be where they know people and know how the system works. But perhaps it is also saying something more important. Many managers and clinicians, while recognising the achievements of the English NHS, do not want to ape it in every respect. They value much of the 'Welsh approach' to health policy. For example, they support the priority given in Wales to improving people's health, rather than just treating ill health. Moreover, they distrust the abrasive, target-driven and unforgiving managerial climate which they perceive in the English NHS.

What this may be calling for is a new Welsh way. The leaders of services in Wales want to be able to match the performance of the English NHS on waiting times and other issues, but they also want a regime which is close to the front line of service delivery, which understands and values local diversity, and which achieves a balance between short term performance and long term, sustainable progress in improving the nation's health.

figure 1: if you could chose, on which health care system would you choose to rely for the care of a loved one?

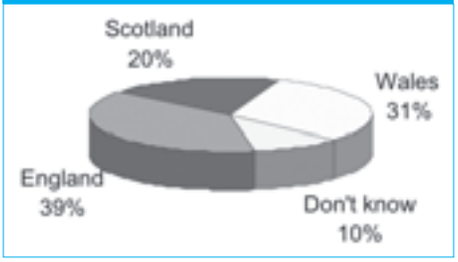
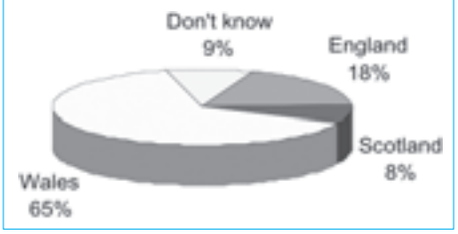


figure 2: if you could choose, in which health care system would you want to work?



- *Marcus Longley is Senior Fellow and Associate Director, and Tony Beddow Senior Fellow at the Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care, University of Glamorgan.*

table 4: will current objectives be well on the way to being achieved by May 2007?

	Total	LHB	Trust	CHC	Prof Orgs.	Social Servs
What do you think of the following? Median scores: 1=strongly agree, 2=tend to agree, 3=tend to disagree, 4=strongly disagree						
a The re-shaping of health and care services in Wales along the lines suggested by Derek Wanless	2	2	3	3	3/4*	2
b No-one in Wales will be waiting more than 6 months for in-patient treatment	3	3	3	3	3	3
c Welsh orthopaedic waiting times in line with those of England	3	3	3	3	3	3
d The Welsh NHS Information Technology strategy on target	3	3	3	3	4	3
e Recruitment and retention will be such that no service failures occur because of human resource shortfalls	3	3/4*	3	3	4	3
f The reported performance of all Welsh Social Services Authorities will be satisfactory or higher	3	3	3	3	3	3
g No NHS Trusts will be in financial recovery (having to deal with deficits)	3	3	3	3	3	3
h LHBs will generally be regarded as effective commissioners	3	2	3	3	3	2
i The NHS and the voluntary sector will have forged an effective partnership	2	2	2/3*	2	2	3
j Public and patient involvement in service planning and monitoring will be having a major impact	3	3	3	3	3	3

*The median value fell between these two scores

a programme that answers back

alun burge reports on progress with Communities First

Communities First, the Welsh Assembly Government's flagship programme to combat social exclusion which has been running for three years, has won wide-ranging support. One academic recently described it as the "most daring in Western Europe", while an observer from the private sector said that the process at the heart of the programme was 'outstanding'.

The principles upon which it was established – a long term, non-prescriptive, 'bottom up' approach, with a heavy emphasis on communities identifying priorities, still underpins its operation. It focuses on the 100 most deprived wards in Wales, together with 32 sub ward areas and ten 'Communities of Interest'.

However, the adoption of such an innovative approach is providing considerable challenges to all involved, including local government, the voluntary sector, and the Assembly Government itself. It is not a simple grant scheme. It is live and organic and capable of answering back. For the programme to continue to succeed, a number of interlocking factors need to be successfully addressed:

- Communities First partnerships must become strong enough to assume responsibilities within the programme. A small number of partnerships are already at a stage of maturity where they can manage large resources, engage with service providers, and, for example, enter into a dialogue with the Assembly Government on the impact of policies on the ground. As the majority of partnerships are not yet sufficiently strong, the ongoing building of their capacity is necessary to ensure that the programme has a sound organisational base.
- Resources, policies and relationships must be aligned to focus on the most deprived areas. While there was much to be done from a standing start, there is evidence that this is beginning to happen with mainstream policies, programmes and spending within the Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities, and ASPBs focussing in on designated areas. Assembly policies are being harmonised to support Communities First areas. By way of a pilot, detailed work is underway between Assembly Divisions and Merthyr Borough Council to look at how policy and practice knit together on the ground in the Communities First area of Gurnos. Lessons learned there will inform practice elsewhere.
- More challenging than the focussing of policies and funding, is the nature of the relationship between the service provider and the community. While a local authority housing department may be concentrating much of its spending on its Communities First areas, the quality of the dialogue on what and how the resources are used is as important as the use of the resources themselves. Some local authorities are embracing this agenda of cultural change, and the police service too has been convinced by the benefits of such an approach. However, for some it has been more difficult to embrace. Both members and officers in authorities

Mixing the mood music during a 'Family Fun Day' at Pencoedtre Park, Gibbonsdown, Vale of Glamorgan. The event was jointly organised by a group consisting of representatives from the Communities First Partnership, residents, the Police and Fire Service.

can feel challenged by the shifts necessary to move from traditional ways of working. In a recent meeting of the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee, Huw Lewis, the Deputy Minister said that authorities have to learn to 'let go'.

- Good practice needs to be catalogued and shared. The diffuse nature of the programme, where what happens in one area might be quite different from any other, means that it is both essential and difficult to transfer learning. However, the Communities Directorate, the Welsh Local Government Association and the Communities First Support Network are working together to achieve just that.

All these are long term areas of work. The strengthening of local community capacity, the tying in of policies and resources, the changing of the balance in local relationships in favour of the people in the communities and the sharing of good practice will require a dogged persistence to achieve. However, the generational nature of the programme means that over time these can combine to address the deep rooted issues that underpin deprivation. Such an approach is necessary because previous policies, which have a lineage going back seventy years, have not succeeded in grappling with the complexity of issues that comprise social exclusion.

The priorities identified by local communities, whether health issues, such as diabetes amongst young people, or economic inactivity, can be expected to change as partnerships develop and mature. The more developed partnerships are already asking larger questions and posing challenges for the Assembly Government and local authorities to address.

The long term nature of the programme, which is seeking to address deep rooted problems, will in itself provide a challenge. By its nature, lasting change will be incremental and, at times, slow to build. Managing multiple expectations will always be an area that requires close attention. A number of mechanisms already exist that can contribute. An independent evaluation which provides regular and detailed feedback, an Assembly Directorate which is committed to being open and accessible, and staff who increasingly are working close to the ground, are collaborating to anticipate, and engage with, problems before they arise.

The size of Wales, and its capacity to have close working relationships across institutions and sectors, also allows concentrated attention to be paid to specific issues as they emerge, whether they be the quality of local relationships, the stance of a local body or getting an ASPB to engage with the programme. Finally, serious and regular reflection takes place on the feedback that comes back from a variety of sources, which in turn informs and shapes the future direction of travel of the programme.

Thus far Communities First has retained support because it has been seen to succeed in getting local people to engage in the issues that concern them. A solid platform exists upon which to build. The challenge now is to maintain that dynamic in the coming years.

- *Alun Burge is Head of the Communities First Programme in the Social Justice and Regeneration Department, Welsh Assembly Government.*

haunt of the horse

charles de winton reports on Wales' latest long distance footpath, the Epynt Way

Creation of the Epynt Way long-distance footpath, encircling 30,000 acres of training land owned by the Ministry of Defence in south Powys near Sennybridge is now well underway. It involves a 90 kilometre circular route following the boundary of the training area. It aims to link all the existing rights of way, many of which currently stop at the range boundary. Around 40,000 soldiers pass through the Epynt ranges each year and many of the exercises involve live bullets and ammunition. This has meant that until now the public has been banned from large areas for safety reasons.

Nine sections of the route have been identified, between access points reached by public roads. The first section, named Disgwylfa ('Watchtower') was launched last October. It runs from the conservation centre, near Sennybridge (Grid Ref SN 993438), around the north-east of the area to the Garth Road viewing point (Grid Ref SN964466). The course then proceeds in an anti-clockwise direction around the edge of the Training Area.

The project is the result of collaboration between the Ministry of Defence, Powys County Council, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Welsh Development Agency. Between them they have appointed an Epynt Way Development Officer and prepared detailed plans for opening and managing the footpath.

The project represents a first for the Army Training Estate, since it is a permissive route that will remain open to the general public for the majority of the time, although it may need to be closed occasionally for military training. It will provide opportunities for walkers, horse riders and mountain bikers as well as the less energetic who can utilise viewing points, picnic areas and the conservation centre. It will link into numerous public rights of way that lead on to the training area.

The Epynt Way is located in what has been recognised as a blank spot in terms of mid Wales and routes north and south. However, it links to the Wye and Usk Valley walks and is also close to the Three Rivers Ride. Recently launched by the British Horse Society, this runs from Herefordshire to the Mountain Centre at Libanus, near Brecon.

The Disgwylfa phase has provided a pilot for the whole project. For walkers it has proved to be an exhilarating four and a half hour experience with plenty of variety in views and terrain. Some would prefer a shorter circular walk and the feeder public rights of way provide this opportunity. There have been two problems for horse riders with several boggy patches and some

steep ravines. An alternative route has been provided around one ravine and another is to be improved. Work is also in hand to drain the worst bog holes. However, a third potential user group, mountain bikers have not found this phase to their liking.

In planning the project great attention has been paid to the fragile Epynt environment with its unique ecology and Sites of Special Scientific Interest as well as its many historical and archaeological sites. Because it has been unharmed by modern farming practices for more than 40 years the area is an important conservation area. It is an internationally important site for wax cap fungi, and home to a rare orchid and moss.

It is anticipated that the project will be a boost to the local economy. For instance, local farmers and bunk house owners plan to use the Epynt Way to expand their bed and breakfast businesses. The Epynt Way also offers a further facility just outside the Brecon Beacons National Park, which it is hoped will take some of the pressure off the heavily used areas of the Brecon Beacons and surrounding areas. Interest has also been expressed from local people and businesses involved with horses. In addition to the bed and breakfast businesses, it is hoped that additional businesses will emerge that cater for putting up not only people but horses.

Establishing the remaining eight phases of the project lies ahead. The four phases along the southern edge of the Sennybridge Training Area all involve river crossings, which require the construction of bridges or fords. Substantial parking facilities are required for horseboxes at the major access points and some shelters and refuges from the elements are also envisaged. The path is designed to be low maintenance but there will be an ongoing need for bi-annual path topping and maintenance as well as repair of damaged surfaces.

Thought is also being given to promoting the path with guides and souvenirs. A distinctive logo designed by Powys County Council staff has been registered as a trademark for use on correspondence and merchandise. This is based on the traditional local description of Mynydd Epynt as the 'haunt of the horse' – until the compulsory purchase in 1940, many horses roamed the hill but, unlike the sheep, their presence proved incompatible with the military activity. Welsh and English language websites are also under development with up to date information including maps and descriptions.

- *Charles de Winton is Estate Advisor with the Army Training Estate, Wales.*

Members of Powys County Council's Rights of Way Team inspecting the first 'Disgwylfa' section of the Epynt Way. The route of the path can be seen in the middle ground of the picture.

alan knight says retailers should work with government in producing environmental impact assessments for the products they sell

greening consumption

For a global retailer like Kingfisher, with over 600 home improvement stores in 12 countries and sales last year of over £7 billion, actively promoting consumption is what we do. We need to ensure the forward progression and growth of the business, and that means persuading more people to go into more of our shops and buy more products, more often.

So an acknowledgement that present rates of consumption, both globally and in particular the developed Western World, need to slow down – even decrease – if we are to sustain our available natural resources, does not immediately sit easily with a business like ours.

A paradox facing responsible retailers is how to continue to promote consumption while also promoting sustainability. It is crucial that we face up to it and seek to find workable and retail-friendly solutions. Sustainable consumption is a huge debate, one we are only just beginning to scratch the surface of, but one that retailers must engage with fully if meaningful decisions are to be made.

Consumer products – from the laptop I'm writing this article on to the chair you are sitting in to read it – form the unspoken agenda for sustainability. While issues like global warming or water supply are given massive prominence, we rarely connect the goods around us with this debate.

But we should. According to the World Wildlife Fund's Living Planet Report published last year, the global average of consumption of natural resources – what's known as our ecological footprint – is 2.3 hectares per person. However, in the developed economies of Western Europe this figure rises to around 5 hectares. As a result, the WWF estimated that "if everyone around the world consumed natural resources and generated carbon dioxide at the rate that we currently do in the UK, we would need *three planets* to support us".

The italics are mine. But the impact of this assessment should come as a wake up call to everyone. The 2003 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development increased the pressure for more radical initiatives to bring about a step change to enable economic growth without environmental degradation. The UK Government's response was to put forward its plans for a Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production.

This commitment to develop a strategy is welcome, but it is only a start. Sustainable consumption is a vast topic. No Government can yet boast a sustainable consumption policy that addresses the deeper psychological drivers behind consumption. It is a huge uncomfortable debate, which will take a long time to turn into robust policy.

A brief example outside my own direct sphere of influence is to look at the marketing of food products. In reality we should have only a very small proportion of fatty and sugary foods in our diet, with fruit, vegetables, and dairy products forming the largest part. However, TV and other media marketing has this proportion reversed: nearly 90 per cent of all food adverts are for fatty and sugary foods. What this tells us is that there are many drivers of consumption other than necessity or indeed what it best for us. Simply assuming that consumption levels and habits more generally will change, or even that legislation will have a meaningful immediate impact, is not going to be a satisfactory answer.

Instead we need to provide opportunities for consumption to occur within a sustainable framework that proves attractive to consumers, not forcing them into an unwanted change in their buying habits. One clear step along this path would be to consider how we can all work to make our everyday products 'greener'. Let me delve into my own life a moment to explain what I mean.

I live in Hythe where, according to the marketing brochure, 'the New Forest meets the sea.' Everyday from my back garden I can see huge container ships

chug up and down Southampton Water. Each one carries upwards of four thousand 40-foot containers stuffed full of products from every corner of the world, ready to be picked up and carried onwards by rail or road to their final destination.

Who am I to complain – after all, the products in these containers pay my wages. B&Q, which Kingfisher owns, imports more consumer product containers than most companies in the UK. Consequently, I have a selfish interest in this trade. The prosperity of factories and supply chains around both the developed and developing world is also heavily dependent on it (as is my home town of course).

I also rely on this trade in a more basic way. The things crammed into those containers contribute to my overall quality of life. Things would be a little less comfortable without my £10 pine toilet seat made in China, and I could not have installed it without my £2 screwdriver from Taiwan.

So, we all need products. The buying and selling of things fuels our quality of life and our prosperity. But when I see the container ships I am awestruck by one thing. We are consuming vast amounts of raw materials and energy and creating masses of potential waste in the process. This cannot be sustainable and we need to do something to start making it so.

Which is where the 'greening' of products comes in. It will take a lot to make my Chinese loo seat truly sustainable, but (for example) using timber certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, ensuring the factory in China looks after its employees and strips out over-packaging, will make a difference. Given the sheer volume of loo seats sold each year in the UK that adds up.

Greening products is a sophisticated business, and like most jobs it needs a variety of tools if it is to be done properly. With so many different issues and products a one-size-fits-all approach is not going to work. We need a variety of solutions that can drive environmental improvements in products: a policy 'toolbox' where the more sophisticated the job, the more specialised the tool needs to be.

Getting into the swing of consumerism.

In some cases, the driver is the customer, but in others it is the manufacturer or the retailer. It may mean developing a 'family' of graded labels for homes, cars and domestic equipment, which are the main end-user products contributing to climate change. But it is not just about labelling. Retail procurement policy, even new laws, are part of the equation. No one group is solely responsible, nor are any absolved from responsibility.

One strong example of what I mean would be to produce an 'Environmental Impact Assessments' for products. Let me take you back to my house. As our prosperity grows so does our drive to buy more products, with the end result that we need to import more. I see this impact directly – a new container port is now required in Southampton.

One site considered was an important wildlife habitat which started a debate about the trade off between job creation and nature conservation. And the tool that the debate revolved around was an Environmental Impact Assessment on the proposed port. The result was that the site was declined. This was an important decision, but in recognising it, I am prompted to ask a further question: has anyone done an equivalent exercise on the products that this port will handle? Such as the several million loo seats a year that require over 3,000 containers, lots of wood and packaging, not to mention the energy expended in the making and distribution of them?

This example may seem trivial. But if we extend this idea to a myriad of other everyday products, such as cars, household equipment or food, then the overall impacts under scrutiny would be huge. In a nutshell, if we are going to be serious about sustainable consumption and remove the hypothetical need for three planets to sustain us in the future, then the Government and retailers must together demonstrate some real commitment to greening everyday products. As always, there is no silver bullet solution. No perfect eco-label or tax technique can ever do more than a fraction of the job.

But I firmly believe that by embracing the 'toolbox' approach to policy, and adopting the principle of Environmental Impact Assessments for products, we can make radical progress. These ideas are only part of what a sustainable consumption agenda should be. But they are a start.

- *Alan Knight is Head of Social Responsibility at Kingfisher plc. This article is based on a presentation he gave to a BRASS seminar at Cardiff University during 2004.*

cafeteria catholicism

harri pritchard jones assesses the impact of Benedict XVI on a church that punches above its weight in Wales

It is some comfort that Benedict XVI bears the name of the pope who gave us our own independent church nearly ninety years ago. Writing in 1916, the year of the Irish Rising, Pope Benedict XV declared: "Wales, a nation of Celtic origin, differs from so much of the rest of England in language, traditions and ancient customs, that it would seem in the ecclesiastic order also to call for separation from the other churches and for the possession of its own hierarchy."

In theory Wales has its own hierarchy, but with just three dioceses it is considered too small to act on its own. As a result it joins with England in a Bishops' Conference of the two countries. On the other hand Scotland is totally independent in the Roman Catholic order. Nevertheless, the late Pope John Paul II stressed Wales's separateness with repeated encouragement for the use of Welsh in the liturgy. When he visited Britain in 1982 he chose to go from England to Scotland and then to Wales, kissing the ground of the three countries, speaking some Welsh, having only the Welsh flag flying together with the Papal flag, and leaving Britain for Rome from Cardiff airport.

These gestures had a profound effect on many Catholics in Wales. They began to become Welsh Catholics since even the Pope of Rome considered Wales to be a country and a nation. In recent years Roman Catholicism has been growing in Wales The growth of the Church in Wales in recent decades may now be seen as a growth of Welsh Catholicism more so than of Catholics in Wales. The Catholic community is gradually taking up Saunders Lewis's challenge to see themselves as part of the tradition originating in the days of Dewi Sant and the Age of Saints, rather than being Irish or Italian or English Catholics who happen to live in Wales.

About 150,000 Welsh people identify themselves as Catholic, with many keeping some sort of contact with the Church. It is reckoned that some 37,000 regularly attend Sunday Mass. This compares with the Anglican Church in Wales, the largest body of Welsh Christians, which has some 75,000 Easter communicants. These two Episcopalian churches are now the two largest denominations, while the sad, steady decline in the Nonconformist numbers continues.

The response to the death and burial of the late Pope John Paul II showed that the Welsh in general have lost their old antipathy to the Roman Catholic Church. At the same time it is not easy to find out what the general feelings in Wales are about the new Pope himself. Most people of good will wish him well and tend to suspend judgment for the present. It is true that the Welsh Roman Catholic community and Church are more cohesive than in England or in the Anglican world. There is little support for abortion, though the Church does approve of the removal of a cancerous womb, for instance, even if it holds a live baby, acting according to the principle of double effect. For many that is simply casuistry, but it is a fundamental principle for the Catholic Church that it is the intention that counts, whatever the side effects. And that is not equivalent to saying the end justifies the means. The same principle of double effect is involved in the allowing of people to die in a dignified way, but never to deliberately kill. The new Archbishop of Cardiff, a trained lawyer, has been to the front in elucidating these issues to parliamentarians and the media.

The issues of married priests and contraception are less fundamental. The first is a matter of Church discipline rather than doctrine, and the Church does have married male priests in various sections of it, including one in this country. The principle of family planning has also been agreed and accepted during this last generation, and it is the methods used that are at issue. Ideally, no one would wish to have to use condoms or the various pills or devices fitted in the vagina or womb in order to prevent conception,

and surely medical science will succeed before long in producing a relatively inexpensive method which is effective and respects human dignity. The use of condoms to prevent the passage of the HIV virus is not totally condemned by the teaching authorities, and is a matter of debate at present. Alas, it is unlikely that males in the third world will choose to use them, and, as usual, it is the women who suffer.

Talking about women, it is rumoured that it was the present Pope, as cardinal, who tried to give the late Pope's statement that the question of ordaining women was out of bounds the status of an infallible pronouncement. What we, who support the ordination of women, as well as more collegiality (devolution to local hierarchies) within the Church, call ourselves is 'the loyal opposition', and this movement has become stronger in the Welsh Church.

Sometimes, what is upsetting is a matter of wording. Too often the Latin mal is rendered into English as 'evil' rather than 'wrong' or 'disordered'. This has been very obvious in statements about homosexuality. Most Welsh Catholics would not be homophobic. On the other hand, they would not support acknowledging homosexual partnerships as marriages. The Church always preaches an ideal whilst dealing with human frailty and fault in its pastoral work.

On the question of divorce, many Welsh Catholics would favour a practice akin to that of the Orthodox Churches, which allow limited divorce, and it is reliably reported that as Cardinal Ratzinger, the present Pope has moved recently towards allowing the 'innocent' parties in divorces to receive Holy Communion, which is a step in that direction.

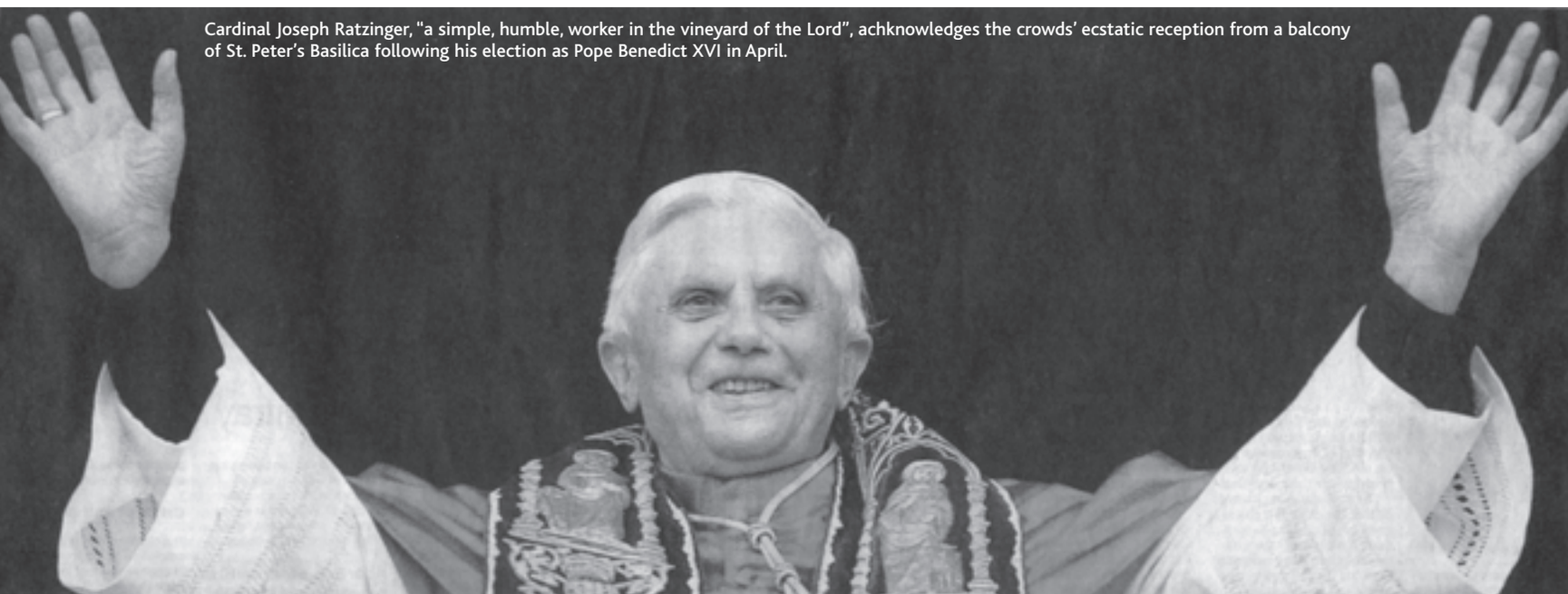
Certainly, very many Welsh Catholics, like their fellows in the West, are to some degree or other 'cafeteria Catholics', in that they pick and choose what doctrines they obey or follow. This is not always a sign of weakness, but a way of showing what the *sensus fideii* is, namely what the believing community of Catholics feel is right; and it is an important element in the way the Church learns how to develops its doctrines and practices.

In all this, ecumenical relations are central, and the Church has to reiterate its belief that there is good in all religions and in all people of good will, whilst still asserting that the totality of the Christian Faith resides in the Roman Catholic Church. The new Pope seems to be moving towards acceptance of this in his sermons since he was elected. The Catholic Church in Wales has been a pioneer in these matters. In the 1960s it united with the other churches to produce the new translation of the Bible into Welsh in the 1960s. Later it joined what is now CYTUN as a full member before that happened in the rest of the UK or Ireland, and more recently it has joined in enthusiastically in the Welsh Inter-faith Council.

In many ways, the Catholic team leads the way on many issues because it is more coherent and cohesive, without being monolithic. Welsh Catholics are welcome to contribute to almost all Welsh papers and magazines in both languages, and the profile of the contributors is prominent and acceptable. The Church does punch above its weight in Wales, but it increasingly suffers from that 'cafeteria' mentality.

Benedict XVI may change this. On the basis of his track record he may try to eliminate all pick and choose loyalty, as he has silenced theologians who did not meet with his approval. However, as Pope he will have to tread gently if he is to recover a profile of the Church that is appealing and loving and tolerant in the eyes of Europeans, including the Welsh.

- *Harri Prichard Jones is a Catholic writer and co-chair of Yr Academi Cymreig.*



Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "a simple, humble, worker in the vineyard of the Lord", achknowledges the crowds' ecstatic reception from a balcony of St. Peter's Basilica following his election as Pope Benedict XVI in April.

glanmor williams 1920 – 2005

kenneth o morgan on the founder of the 20th Century school of Welsh historians

The Welsh have been writing history, theirs and other people's, from Giraldus in the twelfth century to Gwyn Alf in the twentieth. But I believe that Glanmor Williams, who died in Swansea on 24 February 2005, was the most important of them all. He was not only a remarkable historian in his own right: he made the history of Wales over two millennia a project, a discipline, a craft for scholars, and a key to the national identity for the ordinary man and woman.

The son of a Dowlais miner in the hard years and going to Cyfarthfa school, he drew inspiration from his native community, movingly expressed when he received the freedom of Merthyr in 2002. He was a brilliant student at Aberystwyth: his lifelong devotion to the 'college by the sea' was abundantly clear when he became its vice-president when I was its Vice Chancellor in the 1990s. And in Swansea, he made his department as productive of gifted young talent as was the legendary fly-half factory in the world of rugby. In this diminutive man, Wales has lost its biggest historian and one of its greatest sons.

His achievement lay in four main areas. First, as a writing historian, his legacy was immense. Specialising in Tudor history, he wrote three massive works, each of them a classic. *The Welsh Church from Conquest to Reformation* (1962) began life as Chapter One of a study of the Reformation in Wales. It ended up as an extraordinary synoptic survey of Welsh religious, cultural and social life in the medieval period, with a matchless grasp of the literary evidence and remarkable empathy for the Catholic faith from a Welsh Baptist. Dom David Knowles, the Cambridge grandmaster, hailed it as a masterpiece. His volume on the years, 1415 – 1642 in the 'Oxford History of Wales' series (1987) dealt with total authority on the varied torments of his people from the aftermath of Glyndwr's rising to the coming of the civil war. The Act of Union in 1536 is handled with calm authority, quite without polemic. And in 1997, forty-seven years after he began his research, his culminating study of *Wales and the Reformation* finally appeared. But over six decades a mighty torrent of other work appeared, much of it ranging over the whole of Welsh history on themes such as language, literacy, religion and nationality, and the interface between culture and social change.

Secondly, he was a great strategist, director, editor, almost impresario. He was the first editor of the *Welsh History Review* in 1960; he laboured indefatigably to bring to completion the edited six volumes on the Glamorgan County History; he was the natural choice to be editor of the 'Oxford History of Wales', still sadly incomplete. His interests in the industrial period also became important, notably in his leadership of the south Wales coalfield project after 1972. Glan always led from the front. As long-term chairman of the Board of Celtic Studies, on the Commission on Ancient Monuments, in the worlds of libraries, archives and local history, he was omnipresent and inspirational. Indeed, he turned these talents beyond

the world of history, serving as a staunch governor and chairman of the BBC in Wales in the later sixties, standing up to the bullying of George Thomas at the time, and ensuring, while serving on the Hughes-Parry committee in 1965, that the Welsh language gained 'equal validity', legally and morally, with English.

Third he was a matchless teacher, not only for his students in Swansea and in other universities, but in academic events like the John Rhys lecture to the British Academy, a bravura performance which I heard. He was also a tireless contributor to extra-mural and part-time teaching, to local history societies and the WEA. Glan believed passionately in all this: it was a gospel of citizenship. And he retained all his skills to the end. The last time I met him was when we had dinner after what turned out to be his last lecture, in the Schools in Oxford on 7 February. An account of Sir Edward Carne, a leading Welsh official under Henry VIII and Mary, it was full of life as well as learning, with all Glan's grasp of detail, power of communication and sheer fun well on display. Sadly, it may have been just a bridge too far for the strength of a man of nearly 85.

And finally he was unique in the way he encouraged and inspired younger colleagues. I joined his department in Swansea in 1958, initially as Research Fellow in Welsh Social History at a stipend of just £600 a year. But in intellectual stimulation and scholarly comradeship, I was as rich as Croesus. How could I not be when soon after Glan himself brought in historians of Wales like Rees Davies, Ralph Griffiths, Prys Morgan, John Davies and the late Bill Greenway amongst my colleagues, with Dai Smith, David Jones, David Howell, Peter Stead, Gareth Elwyn Jones and Hywel Francis (the last three, like Geraint Jenkins, another Swansea product, all pupils of Glan's and mine)?

There was a wonderful older colleague in Glan's contemporary and close friend, Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, colleagues like David Walker, Muriel Chamberlain and Neville Masterman who worked on both Welsh and English themes, and always Glan himself for intellectual leadership, bright as a button, deeply human. His department breathed fraternity. He taught us Wales had an important, coherent past. Some people even concluded it had a future, too. Out of our dispassionate scholarship, perhaps, came the green shoots of devolution.

A portrait of Glan Williams taken in 1962 from his autobiography *Glanmor Williams – A Life*, published by the University of Wales Press in 2002.

He was a deeply civilized man, too, passionate for art and opera and Italy, an enthusiastic companion at rugby internationals, agile wicket-keeper for the staff cricket team (I succeeded him). During my year in New York in 1962 – 3, busy though he was, he sent a stream of messages on matters of the mind (and sometimes the heart). His sheer decency never emerged more movingly than when I told him in 1966 I was leaving for Oxford. It made him sad – and I realised that I was sad too and wanted to stay at Swansea. Yet, he still advised me to move on to Oxford, just because he thought it would be better for me in the long run. Nearly 40 years later, I still wonder. But I do know that my eight years with Glan were the most fulfilling of my professional life, and that this man had huge reserves not only of intellect but of character, spirit and soul.

Glan's values and idealism were the key to him. Some of this emerges in his charming little memoir published in 2002. He cared deeply for his colleagues, and spurred on their often faltering search for truth with his insight and wit. Cheerfulness was always breaking through; he was bubbling and outgoing equally in Welsh and English. He and Fay, his wife and partner for over half a century were devoted to each other (early on, he supervised his wife's thesis, not an easy task as I know from my own experience!). Beyond his family, he was a selfless public servant on commissions, as a magistrate, in the Welsh Baptist Union. He educated Wales in understanding its collective memory and sense of identity. For myself, I feel I have lost the most influential man in my life other than my father, someone who taught me how to be an historian, why it mattered so desperately. Even more than my other mentor, David Williams in Aberystwyth (Glan's teacher too), he articulated my core values, with an overlay of valleys socialism, innate democracy, and love of nation and language. Robert Blatchford, the socialist editor of Clarion, wrote of William Morris, 'Strike at him where you would, he rang true'. So it was with Glan and his truth goes marching on.

- *Lord Kenneth O. Morgan was a lecturer at the University of Wales, Swansea, 1958 – 66, and became an honorary fellow there in 1985. His* Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880 – 1980 *(1981) was the first volume to be published in the Oxford History of Wales series edited by Glanmor Williams.*

winners lose out

peter stead

As always I greatly enjoyed the Election. In the absence of the Olympics and any sporting World Cup, it is always comforting to know that at 10pm every evening you do not have to worry whether there will be anything interesting on television. I love the transmissions of the daily banter, so long as the participating politicians do not get bogged down in the issues. In the words of the woman in one of Matt's incomparable cartoons, "I like the negative personal attacks, but all the policy stuff turns me off".

People kept on about the proceedings being boring but I was being better entertained than in any of the fourteen elections I recall. For the first time I felt under no obligation to vote for the party to which I had thought myself committed for life. I had been given the novel opportunity of inspecting all the runners and riders and, as if in response to my new feeling of political freedom and curiosity, my constituency served up no less than eight candidates. Fortunately I did not meet any of these worthies and I must warmly thank them for not darkening my doorstep. Undisturbed I could settle down to read their rather desultory literature, once it had been separated from the manifestoes of Tesco, Somerfield, the Co-op and Dominos Pizza.

I appreciated the novelty of an open mind and found reasons for warming to every one of the solicitous eight. The fact that the UKIP candidate was the son of my all-time soccer hero was almost sufficient to gain my support until I realised that he had not mentioned this in his leaflet. The Green representative had been one of my more interesting and assiduous students and I had rather liked the way that he had returned one of my books by post some ten years after he had borrowed it.

In the new political dispensation I was prepared to give Plaid serious consideration but at that stage I was diverted by the literature of the Legalise Cannabis candidate. He confessed to being 'not local' and 'from Norfolk' but as other candidates hailed from 'Oxford', 'Surrey' 'Middlesex and France', and the core of the Socialist Alternative candidate's case was that the Labour man had rarely been seen in Swansea, the extent to which any of the eight could claim to be Swansea Jacks was not going to be an issue. But what I liked about the Cannabis man from Norfolk (does it grow better there?) was his sense of history ('Cannabis has been used as a therapeutic herb for hundreds of years') and his emphasis on his own 'special interest in Welsh traditions and mythologies and their links with the history of Ancient Britain'. Wales, however, was hardly a clear issue in this Election - 'You're Plaid aren't you?' I asked my greengrocer. 'No. I'm a Welsh Nationalist,' he casually declared.

Ultimately and inevitably it became a British presidential election and, like most other people, I duly voted against the incumbent, almost entirely on the basis of his integrity. The vote on 5 May delivered almost precisely the result that most traditional Labour supporters wanted. Essentially the President had been defeated. Graphically the television close-ups told it all. No loser has ever looked so happy, no so-called winner so gutted. Hopefully, the real winner will be a House of Commons that now quite urgently needs to use what is essentially an interregnum to rediscover its integrity, vitality and constitutional identity.

Nevertheless, we all have to accept the undoubted fact that our politics will remain presidential. The imminent plethora of leadership contests will make that clear. There were no real issues in the Election of 2005 and perhaps it is the case that issues will always be mediated by personality, whether that of politicians or broadcasters. Of course, the real stars of the election were Paxman, Marr, Mair and Humphrys. But they were not the people's tribunes as they fondly imagined themselves to be. Rather they were rival entertainers distancing us from serious debate to the same extent as the politicians they struggled to nail down.

The next General Election will be won by a good-looking man in his late forties wearing a blue shirt with alternatively a red or blue tie. He will almost certainly be a Tory. No party can now afford to select as leader a mere worthy. What could the Lib Dems have achieved in 2005 if they had found a leader who looked as if he was enjoying himself? In Wales, too, this election highlighted the need for politicians who can communicate, listen and sparkle a little. Meanwhile, let us hope that able young people realise that politics is more worthwhile than broadcasting. Plaid urgently needs a man in a blue shirt. Now just imagine the future reaction of the Wales Labour camp, under their new woman leader, when it is announced that Huw Edwards is to lead Plaid Cymru.